UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA

The Growth of Theatre in Edmonton: From the early 1920s to 1965

by

Mary Ross Glenfield

A thesis submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of

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Dedication

To all the people, known and unknown, who worked

to make Edmonton theatre the vibrant entity that it is today.

Abstract

The city of Edmonton has an unusually large number of theatres, mainly professional, for its size. By examining the theatrical history of the city, the aim of this thesis is to show the way in which this theatre environment grew, from the early nineteen-twenties to nineteen-sixty-five. Just as importantly, it will show the influence of those people (teachers, directors, actors and leaders), who were involved with the different facets and streams of theatre in the schools, in the community, at the university, and in the civic and provincial governments.

In the late nineteenth century and the early years of the twentieth century, the theatre in Edmonton was mainly produced by the touring companies from Britain and the United States, and from a few local groups coming together to put on amateur dramatics. But in the nineteen-twenties, the great interest in community theatre began. Various groups, and individuals within those groups, started to lay the foundations for a strong tradition of theatre-going and theatre-participation in the city.

By the late 1940s, there were various streams of theatre in the city, each of which is discussed under its own heading: school, community, university, children's, and subsidized (provincial and civic). There were strong people of vision providing leadership to each of the theatre streams, passing on their experience and knowledge to others who came after them

Edmonton theatre had the good fortune to have a group of people, living within a generation of each other, who were both the inspiration and the role models for those who worked with them.

Acknowledgements

First, I should like to express my thanks to all the people who gave time and thought to my interviews with them; especially Walter Kaasa, Phillip Silver and Daisy Wilson, who shared their archival material with me. Their personal views and observations were invaluable. I am also grateful to Joan Heys Hawkins for her initial help and suggestions.

Next, I should like to thank my supervisory committee, Dr. Alex Hawkins, Dr. Diane Bessai and Dr. Piet Defraeye, and my defense chair, Professor Kim McCaw, for their interest in the thesis. I would like to extend special thanks to Diane Bessai for her suggestion for the thesis topic, and for her encouragement.

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Abbreviations

APA	Alberta Provincial Archives
CEA	City of Edmonton Archives
CH	*Calgary Herald*
CWTG	Canadian Women's Theatre Guild
EB	*Edmonton Bulletin*
EJ	*Edmonton Journal*
RC	*Rôle Call*
TEFYA	Theatre Edmonton for Young Audiences
TT	*Town Talk*
UAA	University of Alberta Archives

Preface

It is a truism to say that there is a great deal of theatre in Edmonton. Economic surveys have shown that there is more money spent in the city on cultural entertainment, including theatre, than on sports. Liz Nicholls, the current theatre reviewer for the *Edmonton Journal*, has often observed that Edmonton is "a theatre-mad town". How has this phenomenon come about? Is it due to the fact that Edmonton is the most northerly large city in Canada, and therefore may be presumed to be the coldest in winter, leading the public to seek their pleasure indoors? Or is it due to a steady growth of good theatre, and of theatre-going habits in the population? I propose to show that the latter is indeed the case.

However, when the thesis subject was first suggested to me,[1] it was a matter of deciding where to begin. I knew that I would have to consult other authorities, and not rely simply on my own memories. But I reckoned without the sheer mass of archival material, and the way in which this material was scattered throughout the city.

At first, I thought that the various types of theatre would be neatly packaged in the archives related to them. Thus, theatre at the university would be found in the University Archives, the community theatres in the city archives, and so on. But it was not so simple. The whole search was, more or less a crossword puzzle exercise, with one name leading to another.

In the Provincial Archives I did find much to do with provincial government funding and laws. But there was also archival material there for Walterdale Theatre Associates, and also a small amount about Theatre for Children.

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[1]Because I had lived through, and participated in Edmonton theatre since 1951.

The University Archives has much about the Studio Theatre and other university theatrical ventures, but there is also a wealth of material there about the Canadian Women's Theatre Guild.

In the City Archives there were many personal files, which contained valuable information about diverse interests, such as those of Dick MacDonald, Mickey Macdonald and Bette Anderson. It was often a question of looking for a person or a group mentioned in several different files.

Personal interviews were another source of material, and here I was very lucky to have a great many contacts from the earlier theatre days. For instance, Daisy Wilson gave me a big file collected by her late husband, Jack Wilson. Phillip Silver also lent me an early file of his own, to do with Theatre for Children and Playground Players. Most personal interviews had to be backed up with actual data and dates from the various archives; the memories of people tend to be very muddled.

For the actual writing of this material, I realised that I could not possibly go through the years from 1920 to 1965, simply cramming into each year what had happened, theatrically, in the city during that year. For this reason, I decided to write about the various branches of theatrical activity, and deal with each one in turn, noticing how a person, or an event, spanned two or more groups.

At Victoria High School in the late nineteen-twenties, Eva O. Howard was instrumental in the development of a theatrical tradition at the school. Although she never taught drama as a subject, she directed a student play every year, and many of her students continued their work in theatre.

At the end of the nineteen-twenties the Edmonton Little Theatre came into being,

and the first name of those who were involved in its beginnings was that of Elizabeth Sterling Haynes. She helped to develop Little Theatre members in all facets of theatre – acting, directing and design – and when she began in 1932 to work for the Department of Extension at the University of Alberta, her influence went out to towns all over Alberta.

The study of drama at the University of Alberta began in the 1940s, with Sidney Risk as its nominal head, and in the early nineteen-fifties it came into its own under Robert Orchard, followed by Gordon Peacock, both of them men of vision, although very different from each other.

I will also discuss audience education. It has become obvious to me that it was not only the actual groups working together, it was the groups' willingness and ability to change and adapt themselves, and the people connected to these groups and activities being able to give their time and energy to varied projects. In other words, many of the same people who were connected to a group would come together with others to form a different group, or a connected one. . These are all streams or facets of theatre, and in this thesis I hope to show how the various streams in Edmonton theatre flowed together in the 1940s, and even more in the 1950s. Each facet of theatre involved one or more individuals, whose ideas and influence drove forward the overall vision for theatre. The interests of many of these people, and those who worked with them, often spanned several different theatrical streams, whether of school, community or university. This led not only to varied categories of theatre, but also to co-operation, and to the environment for the beginnings of professional theatre in Edmonton in 1965.

Chapter One. High School Theatre

Eva Osyth Howard, born on March 25, 1892, in Glengarry County, Ontario, arrived in Edmonton during the First World War. She had graduated from McGill University in Montreal in 1913. In 1916, she became vice-principal at H.A. Gray School in Edmonton; in 1917 she was principal of Delton School; then in 1918, she was an instructor at the Technical School. Not until she went to Victoria School in 1927 to teach literature and composition did she begin to bring drama to her students. She directed them in plays, but Tom Peacocke, who began as the drama teacher at the school in 1956, says that she was still teaching English there at that time, and never actually taught drama as a subject. Howard worked in both the school and the larger community. In addition to mounting a three-act play every year at the school, she also directed for the Edmonton Little Theatre group, receiving the Dominion Drama Festival's Canadian Drama Award in 1940, for her outstanding contribution to the work of the D.D.F. She also lectured on drama for a number of years at the summer school of the University of Alberta Department of Education.

Eva Howard's influence on her students was immeasurable. Among those whom she directed were Arthur Hiller, the film director; Joe Shoctor, the founder of the Citadel Theatre; Jack McCreath, who became the provincial drama supervisor; the two Neilsons – Erik, who became a Member of Parliament, and Leslie, the film and stage actor; Alan and Marguerite (Mickey) Macdonald, the city solicitor and his wife, both of whom were influential in Edmonton Little Theatre and the Community Theatre, and later in Circle Eight; Dianne Foster (originally Olga Larushka), the film actress; and

many others in the city who made drama either their vocation or their avocation. Victoria High School later became Victoria Composite High School, and is now the Victoria School of Performing and Visual Arts. In 1986, its theatre was named the Eva O. Howard Theatre.

Among the many plays that Eva Howard directed for the school were *Arms and the Man* in 1933, and *Hobson's Choice* in 1934. Following the latter, she was able to get special places for Helmer Hober and Robert Folinsbee – both of whom had performed in these plays – in the theatre program at the Banff School of Fine Arts, where they were taught by the distinguished director, Elizabeth Sterling Haynes and her associate, Theodore Cohen. In 1934, Howard also directed *The Late Christopher Bean* by Sidney Howard at Victoria High School. Gwen Seller played the part of Abbie, a rôle which she repeated ten years later, when Eva Howard directed the same play for the Edmonton Little Theatre in 1944. Eva Howard died on January 8, 1972, at the age of seventy-nine.[1]

On September 1, 1936, Alberta was the first province to initiate drama as an accredited subject for curriculum options in the schools for junior and senior high schools. But it was not until 1950 that the newly constructed Victoria Composite High

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[1]Unfortunately, two very important Eva Howard records have been lost. Robert Folinsbee, one of her former students (now the retired Chairman of the University of Alberta Geology Department, and an executor of her will) says that she wrote her autobiography. It was still in manuscript when she died, but all copies seem to have been lost. However, the Archives Department of Victoria School of Performing and Visual Arts does have a manuscript of a novel called *Ellen: or What the Simple Folk Did*, which Eva Howard was writing just before her death. In a foreword to this novel, she is at pains to state that the story has nothing to do with her own life.

School's auditorium was opened for use by the public. It was then made available to the community for theatrical presentations, virtually at cost. The official opening was not until February 27, 1951, and this is the theatre which was eventually named the Eva O. Howard Theatre. Circle Eight was a regular user of the Victoria facilities, as were the Edmonton Symphony, the Edmonton Civic and Light Operas, and Theatre for Children.

At the end of the 1940s and through the 1950s, drama in the Edmonton schools, as in the rest of the province, grew at a phenomenal rate. During this time, too, the Alberta Provincial Government was pouring money into the schools. In 1937 Betty Mitchell, the renowned drama teacher at Western Canada High School in Calgary, and director of Calgary's Workshop 14, was appointed Chair of the Provincial Committee for Drama for the Alberta Department of Education. This Drama Committee was created to cover the whole province, and to ensure some uniformity between the different school districts in the province. The committee wrote the drama curriculum for all the full-time drama teachers in Alberta. Although there were no exams for any optional subjects, including drama, students were given credits for their work.

After Betty Mitchell, Don Pimm became the chair of the Provincial Committee. He had arrived in Edmonton from the United States in 1952. He first taught at University High School, where his father-in-law, H.E. Tanner, was the principal.[2] Beginning in 1955, he taught for ten years at Strathcona Composite High School, then in 1965, he went to Victoria Composite High School. After his retirement from the school, he taught at Concordia College in the city.

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[2]At the same time, Tanner was a Liberal M.L.A. in the Alberta legislature.

The Edmonton Drama Teachers' Association provided an umbrella under which all the drama teachers in the city had the opportunity to meet. John Rivet, who was the teacher at the main separate school forum for drama, St. Joseph's High School, remembers that the group meetings were casually arranged. Not many of the separate school teachers attended the meetings. Many of the teachers tried to see each others' plays, but there was insufficient time to do this because of involvement in their own productions. There were, of course, the high school drama festivals once a year, where everyone could see the work from schools across the city, but Rivet says that these were supported mainly by the public schools, and even then, there were a limited number of plays from both public and separate schools.

Even the festival entries from public schools were often few and far between. Don Pimm found that he had far too much to do in his own school to enter a play in the festival. Pimm and Walter Kaasa also corroborate John Rivet's statement, that there was too little time for most of the drama teachers to see many, or even any, of the plays in each others' schools. Many of the teachers had evening rehearsals, as well as daytime classes.

The dominant public school in the city was Victoria Composite High School, which pulled people from all over the city. As a result, it also attracted very good teachers, including Walter Kaasa, Tom Peacocke and Don Pimm. Walter Kaasa taught drama at Victoria Composite High School for two years between 1953 and 1956 (during 1954-1955, he was a student at the Central School of Drama in London, England). In 1956, he left the teaching profession to become the Coordinator of Cultural Activities for

the Alberta government and, later, the Assistant Deputy Minister of Culture. Tom Peacocke was the drama teacher at Victoria Composite High School from 1956 to 1959, when he left to take his M.F.A. at the Carnegie Institute of Technology in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. He was succeeded at the school by John Paterson.

The separate school with the most complete drama program was St. Joseph's High School, and this school also instituted a performing arts program in 1968. John Rivet taught drama there from 1956 to 1973. Rivet had taken his B.A. at the University of Washington in 1951. In 1956, he graduated with his B.Ed. from the University of Alberta. He was probably the teacher in the Separate School drama program who had the most interaction with the public school teachers, the community theatre, and the university. He began work with the Separate School Board in 1973, first as Arts Consultant, then as Assistant Supervisor of Drama. After taking his M.Ed. at the University of Alberta in 1980, he returned to the Separate School Board as Supervisor of Drama.

In addition to their school commitments, all of these teachers worked with various community and professional groups; however, four of them wanted to cooperate more fully with each other: Pimm, June Richards, Kaasa and Alice Polley. All had been taught and nurtured at the University of Alberta during the years when Robert Orchard headed the Drama Division, and three were influential later in the Alumni Players, Studio A. They felt there was a need to show what the schools were doing, and the talent that was there. In addition, according to Walter Kaasa, they wanted to do plays which had larger casts and were broader in theme than those which could be done at any individual

high school. These four teachers and their students worked together on *The Blue Bird* by Maurice Maeterlinck, which was directed by Walter Kaasa and designed by Don Pimm. The cast and crew were made up of students from the four Edmonton High Schools involved; the name of the group was created as an anagram incorporating the first two letters of each teacher's name – the Pirikapo Players.[3]

The Blue Bird was showcased at a special performance in the Alberta Regional Dominion Drama Festival in Calgary in February 1954. At that time, the whole company, sponsored by The Canadian Women's Theatre Guild,[4] set out for Calgary with a truck, sixteen sets, fifty students, and the four drama teachers. According to Alice Coutts (Polley), the adjudicator later told the teachers: "This production of *The Blue Bird* is the most exciting thing that I've seen at the festival." However, as none of the teachers had even considered entering the play in the competition, it was not eligible to win for best play.

Unfortunately, the following year, the Pirikapo Players folded after an unsuccessful production of the Chinese play, *The Yellow Jacket* by J.H. Benrimo, directed by Don Pimm. In spite of its short life span, the Players had been a bold and worthwhile experiment, whose inventiveness and spirit of cooperation would have

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[3] This name was suggested by the author Barbara Villy Cormack, and consisted of the first two letters of each of the teachers' surnames: (Don) Pi(mm) of University High School; (June) Ri(chards, now Ferguson) of Westglen, later to be absorbed in Ross Sheppard High School; (Walter) Ka(asa) of Victoria Composite; and (Alice) Po(lley, now Coutts) of Strathcona High School.

[4] A local drama support group, founded by Elizabeth Sterling Haynes the previous year.

repercussions for years to come.

Chapter Two. Community Theatre

In order to set in context the years before the beginning of Edmonton professional theatre we shall have to go back to the origins of the Edmonton Little Theatre in 1929. Dr. W.G. Hardy[5] remembered that: "In the autumn of 1928, Sir Barry Jackson of the Birmingham Repertory Theatre, spoke to a fascinated audience in the University. Then President Wallace called a meeting at his home."[6] These two events were directly responsible for the creation of the Little Theatre in 1929. The first president of the theatre group was Dr. W.H. Alexander; Elizabeth Sterling Haynes was the first head of production; and Frank Holroyd was in charge of stagecraft. Mrs. Haynes resigned in 1932 to become Dramatics Supervisor for the Department of Extension at the University of Alberta. Ted Cohen was director from 1932-33, when Emrys Jones took over the position. Elsie Park Gowan became the editor of the Little Theatre's official publication, *Rôle Call* following Louise Evans, who was the first editor at the magazine's inception in 1935.

The year in which the Edmonton Little Theatre was formed was fortuitous. As shown by Moira Day, the stock market crash of 1929-1930 put paid to the travelling stock companies, making room for the growth of local theatre: "The crash of the Stock Market in October 1929, forever shattered 'the Road' as the dominant dramatic force . .

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5 Professor of Classics at the University of Alberta, and also president of the Canadian Hockey Association.

6 Gowan, Elsie Park, ed. Remembering Elizabeth. Edmonton: Committee for Elizabeth Sterling Haynes Theatre Event, October 1974

. It devastated the two post-war bastions of professional theatre left in Edmonton."[7] Elizabeth Sterling Haynes, who had arrived in Edmonton in 1922 with her dentist husband, Nelson, was a key player in the early Little Theatre days. The first play Mrs. Haynes directed for the U.D.S. was *Dear Brutus* by J.M. Barrie in 1922, and this was to lead to a seven-year fruitful collaboration with the group. But she stumbled badly with her second production – a double-bill of Dunsany's *The Tents of the Arabs* and Shaw's *Fanny's First Play.* In fact, it was "the only one of Haynes' University productions to get less than glowing reviews." *Shall We Join the Ladies?* by James Barrie was presented on December 6, 1929. The play was directed by Haynes, and was entered in the first Alberta Drama League Festival in Calgary.[8] It did not win,but was praised as being "a brave attempt at a subtle, difficult play."[9] In 1930, the University Dramatic Society's play *The Adding Machine* by Elmer Rice was sponsored by the Edmonton Little Theatre. The play was directed by Mrs. Haynes and designed by Frank Holroyd. Christopher J. Jackson played Mr. Zero and Elsie Young (later Gowan) played Mrs. Zero. The scene changes, apparently, were long but the performances were excellent. In fact, Moira Day writes that "... the initial broad community and artistic base of the Edmonton Little Theatre truly made Elizabeth Haynes the most powerful and influential

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[7]Moira Jean Day, Elizabeth Sterling Haynes and the Development of the Alberta Theatre, PhD. Thesis (University of Toronto, 1987), p.43

[8]Haynes was a founding member of the Alberta Drama League in 1929.

[9]Day, ESH, p.49

theatre person in Edmonton."[10]

Very early in the life of the group, on January 6, 1931, the Edmonton Little Theatre School of Direction held its first class; and on May 1 *Liliom*, by Ferenc Molnar was presented at the Pantages Theatre, directed by Mrs. Haynes. On September 24, 1932, she gave a triumphant performance in the title rôle of *Elizabeth the Queen*, directed by Ted Cohen. Gwen Pharis (later Ringwood) made her first Little Theatre appearance in *Hay Fever* by Noel Coward, also directed by Ted Cohen.[11] In addition to her work in Edmonton, Elizabeth Haynes was a co-founder, with Dr. Corbett, of the Banff School of Fine Arts in 1933, and the first University of Alberta Extension Drama Specialist for Alberta from 1932 to 1937.

1932 to 1933 saw the introduction of original one-act plays in the Little Theatre season, performed by the group's Experimental Division. One of these was *The Man Who Wouldn't Fight Back* (the title later changed to *Homestead*) an original, local one-act play by Elsie Park Young (later Gowan), which was a runner-up, winning honourable mention. Honorary President Wallace was very pleased, and thought that the Edmonton Little Theatre was now "serving its purpose to the fullest extent for the first time" (EJ Apr 5, 1933) by encouraging local playwrights. On March 10 and 11, 1933 the Fourth Annual Drama League Festival was held in Lethbridge and *Riders to the Sea* by J.M. Synge, directed by Ted Cohen, with Sue Laycock and Alan Macdonald, and with

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[10]Ibid, p.51

[11]At this time, she was secretary to Mrs. Haynes. Later, she would appear in Eugene O'Neill's *Ah, Wilderness!* directed by Haynes.

Elizabeth Haynes playing Maurya, finished in second place. On April 3 the play was invited to the Dominion Drama Festival finals in Ottawa.

On April 26, 1934, at the Masonic Temple, Elsie Park Gowan's play, *The Giant-Killer,* was one of the Experimental Division's plays at the Masonic Temple, and the following season Frank Holroyd became Director of the Edmonton Little Theatre, which began to give classes in make-up and stagecraft. In fact, they saw to it that their members were well trained in stagecraft, acting and directing; which was, of course, also the case with the later Community Theatre and with Walterdale Theatre Associates up to the present. This kind of training program is the *sine qua non* of any reputable community theatre group. But finances were flagging, which forced the cancellation of the final show. However, they were able to produce one-acts on April 6, 1935, which included *The Hungry Spirit*, by Elsie Park Gowan. The one-acts that year were co-sponsored by St. Joachim's Dramatic Club who themselves mounted Mourrier's *Bon Sang ne Ment Pas*, which later won at the Dominion Drama Festival.

In the 1937-38 season Eva Howard directed her first major production for the Edmonton Little Theatre, a play by J.B. Fagan based on the life of Pepys, *And So To Bed.*[12] Howard had been an early syndic, and was always active in the play-selection committee.

For a number of years, the Edmonton Little Theatre appeared to have had the field more or less to itself. It had its own subsidiary group, the Understudy Club, which

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[12]Mickey and Alan Macdonald told the writer that they had met in this production, which amused them both; they said they got married on the strength of it!

had been started by Les Pilcher, one of the long-time members of the parent group. There was also the Experimental Division, which in the 1935-36 season had changed its name to the Playmakers Club. Maureen Unwin said that she met her husband, Jack in 1939, when both were members of the Little Theatre and the Understudy Club. He was later to play a large part in Edmonton theatre, particularly in musical theatre.

According to Maureen Unwin, the group called the Belasco Players was founded to do mainly comedies. Many of the younger Little Theatre members were involved, but the Belasco Players were not a subsidiary of the older group. Some of the Belasco plays were written by Clyde Gilmour[13] and Bill Walker[14], both of whom were involved in Edmonton radio at the time. In an unsigned article in the December 1939 issue of *Rôle Call*, the writer is at pains to distance the Belasco Players from the Little Theatre by pointing out that the executive committee of the former is not composed of "syndics" as is the latter. However, the names on the Belasco Players' executive for the 1939-1940 season are often the same as those of the Little Theatre syndics; this is presumably the reason for the insistence on differences between the two groups. There was obviously a feeling that the Belasco Players were putting on much lighter fare than the Edmonton Little Theatre. This was the intention of Belasco, to produce comedies, musicals and melodramas. As for the board: "The governing body was formed first. The Board then

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13 Who was later a much-loved regular on the C.B.C. with his program "Gilmour's Album." He was also a columnist for many years with *Maclean's* magazine.

14 Later a performer with the Regina Little Theatre, then an announcer on the C.B.C. He also did TV commercials for Ford of Canada in the 1950s.

selected a group of desirable people to constitute the membership . . . The Belascos operate under a benign dictatorship . . ." (RC Dec. 1939 p. 8). The Little Theatre was thought by many of the younger members, particularly by those who belonged to Belasco, to have too large and diverse a board of syndics. Since the Edmonton Little Theatre and the Belasco Players were operating at the same time, it could hardly be said that one was a re-invention of the other. But the main players were certainly donning first one hat and then the other, which is understandable in a city with a comparatively small population, and therefore a limited talent pool.

On January 24, 1940, the Belasco Players put on a four-night mammoth production of *Aladdin:* or *The Genie With the Light Brown Hair* with co-authors William Wallace and Clyde Gilmour at the Masonic Temple, with the two Clifton girls, Marguerite (Mickey) and Vernis in the leads. Chet Lambertson[15] wrote an arrangement of "The Shadow Waltz", Clyde Gilmour was part of the production crew, and Stuart Carson, later a make-up genius and Studio Theatre actor, designed the set and played the part of the Emperor.

Another group, the Dickens Club, had been set up in September1926 as part of Edmonton Branch #100 of the worldwide Dickens Fellowship. Each year, the amateur theatre group of the Branch put on a play adapted from one of Charles Dickens' stories. This continued until the early 1950s. Most of the actors appear to have been members of the Little Theatre. Les Pilcher was one of the regular actors for both groups. He was

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[15]The composer of the University of Alberta song; later a professor at the University of Victoria.

an Englishman who worked for the City of Edmonton; he had come to Edmonton with his wife, and had soon established himself as a character actor and set builder.[16] The President of the Dickens Club was H.P. Brown[17] of the CKUA Players.

In 1931, the Canadian census found that the province of New Brunswick had the highest rate of illiteracy in the country. In 1936 Mrs. Haynes, who visited New Brunswick in the mid-1930s on holiday, was invited to work there by the provincial government as part of its upgrading process. She accepted this very welcome offer. The Carnegie grant, which had funded her job for the Banff School of Fine Arts,[18] had come to an end, and she was in need of employment. She was first offered a position with the New Brunswick Adult Education summer school from 1936 to 1937. Then from 1937 to 1938, she was the organizer of the literary and dramatic phases of the provincial adult and child educational program. Theodore (Ted) Cohen, who had been her assistant in the Edmonton Little Theatre and at the Banff School, went with her to New Brunswick. He had obtained his law degree at the University of Alberta, and had joined Elizabeth Sterling Haynes from 1930 to 1932 as her assistant director for the Edmonton Little Theatre. From all accounts, having worked so closely over a long period, they had an instinctive understanding of each other's work on plays. In addition

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16 His daughter, Jo (Pilcher) Cormack, and her husband, David Cormack, were later to play an important part in Calgary theatre, with their theatre group, The Buskins, and other ventures.

17 Grandfather of Eric Brown, now a key member of Walterdale Theatre Associates.

18 More about this under the heading "University Theatre".

to working with the Little Theatre, Cohen was also active in the Edmonton Jewish community, with which Mrs. Haynes had a close working relationship, and within which she had many friendships through Mary Samuels, Harvey Kagna, Mrs. Lyons, Mrs. Goldberg, and others who worked with her in the Edmonton Little Theatre, at Talmud Torah hall, and later, at the university.

While in New Brunswick, Haynes and Cohen jointly produced two booklets on make-up and on backstage technical work Then in 1939, Ted Cohen went to New York, where he became a Broadway producer under the name of Theodore Corday. Mrs. Haynes returned to her husband and children in Edmonton. However, the fact that Haynes and Cohen had gone to New Brunswick together, and that she was eleven years older than he, had caused gossip and had split both the theatre community and the Jewish community in Edmonton. Later, when Mrs. Haynes was working at the University of Alberta's Studio Theatre, she was heard to say, "I can fill half the house with my friends and the other half with my enemies!"[19]

On January 22, 1928, the Hebrew Musical Club had put on a Variety Night and Dance, and on February 2, 1930, the Hebrew Musical and Dramatic Society, which may have been the same group, mounted its Fourth Annual Revue. Both of these events were held at Talmud Torah School. On February 12, 1933, the Edmonton Yiddish Schul Dramatic section had put on *Shmates* at the Masonic Temple. The Jewish-Yiddish Cultural and Drama Club continued through the next two decades, putting on a play called *On the Way to America* on January 31, 1954. Mrs.Dasha Zotenberg says that

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[19] Remark to Frank Glenfield, when he was Business Manager of Studio Theatre.

entertainment and playlets went on all through the 1950s, some of them at Beth Shalom Synagogue. A number of scripts were written in Yiddish, and Lotte Landa wrote, developed, and directed them.

There was something of a division between those who acted in "the Jewish community" and those who were part of the wider Edmonton theatre scene. Many of those who took part in the Jewish plays and musical evenings were newcomers whose English was not yet fluent; therefore they felt more at home acting in and watching Yiddish plays. Of course, there were also many Jewish people who took part in the rest of the community theatre. For example, Joe Shoctor acted in the Edmonton Little Theatre, and directed for both the Community Theatre and Edmonton Light Opera. Mary Samuels, Olga Roland, Isadore Gliener, Shelley Alexander (née Superstein), Ted Cohen and his sister, Hazel Cristall, Mimi Newhouse, Phillip Silver, and others worked with Elizabeth Sterling Haynes in the wider theatre community, in the university plays, as well as with Bette Anderson in Theatre for Children. However, there seems to have been little interweaving between the overall theatre scene and the Jewish theatre in Edmonton, except insofar as the people involved who happened to be Jewish knew each other through their synagogues and a network of marriages.

Although Le Théâtre Français had not yet been born, there was a flourishing Cercle Dramatique Molière which mounted *Les Rantzau* at the Masonic Temple (E.J. Mar.24,1936) with M. Alphonse Hervieux and Mlle Gabrielle Hervieux. These actors, father and daughter, also acted with the Edmonton Little Theatre, the Community Theatre, and with the Edmonton Civic Opera company. On December 10, 1938, the

Cercle joined in a festival of three plays for the Edmonton Sub-Regional Dramatic Festival at the University of Alberta's Convocation Hall: the Cercle presented *Les Trois Masques* by Charles Mere, directed by Laurier Picard, with Marie A. Hervieux, Paul Hervieux, Alphonse Hervieux and Picard himself; the University of Alberta Dramatic Society presented *Helena's Husband* by Philip Moeller; and *Still Stands the House* by Gwen Pharis, was directed by Eva Howard with Marguerite (Mickey) Clifton, Jack Folinsbee, Elsie Gowan and Maurice Minton.

In the 1930s, there were also two opera companies in Edmonton. The Edmonton Civic Opera had been formed in 1935, directed and conducted by Mrs. J.B. Carmichael (née Beatrice van Loon), who was known to her cast members as "Auntie Van." Mrs. Carmichael had come to Edmonton in 1919 to conduct a girls' orchestra at the Macdonald Hotel. She married J.B.Carmichael, an Edmonton dentist, taught voice and violin, and played first violin with the Edmonton Symphony Orchestra. Over the years, the Civic Opera performed both light operas such as *The Music Man* by Meredith Wilson and grand operas such as *Carmen* by Georges Bizet. Later, in 1961, John Rivet directed the Civic Opera's production of *Show Boat* by Jerome Kern and Oscar Hammerstein, which played from January 25 to 28 .

In 1940, a breakaway group was formed as an alternative to the Civic Opera, calling itself Opera Slav. The young man who spearheaded this new group was Atha Paul Andrew, son of a Greek father and a Scottish mother. Andrew had graduated that same year in Arts and Law from the University of Alberta. His father owned hotels in Jasper, and Andrew had been brought up in both Edmonton and Jasper. The I.O.D.E.

agreed to sponsor the newly-formed Opera Slav for its production of Smetana's *The Bartered Bride*, with Atha Andrew conducting(EJMar.16,1940). Others connected with the new opera company were G.A. Kevan, choirmaster at Robertson United Church; Tommy Dalkin, dramatic and stage director; and Ambrose Holowach.[20] J. Irving Gish had the leading role. This ambitious production was staged at the Empire Theatre on April 4 - 6,1940, and was judged an unqualified success (E.J. Apr. 5,1940). Everyone of note attended, with Mayor and Mrs. J.W. Fry heading a large party to see the performance.

In 1940, the Opera Slav changed its name to The Empire Opera, and announced a dance and social evening, "probably in Talmud Torah hall" (E.J., Nov. 2, 1940), to discuss its forthcoming production of *The Bat (Die Fledermaus)* early in 1941. Thomas Dalkin, G.A. Kevan, and Walter Holowach, as well as Walter Holowach's brother Ambrose as ballet master, were again involved with the opera throughout late 1940 and early 1941. *The Bat* was a great success (E.J. Mar.7, 1941). The production was again at the Empire Theatre, and was again sponsored by the I.O.D.E; Atha Andrew conducted; Dick MacDonald[21] played a role; his wife Inez was in charge of make-up, and Fred Bentley was the stage manager. It was to be the first of four shows mounted that year by the Empire Opera. At the same time that the Empire Opera produced *The Bat*, the Civic Opera produced *Naughty Marietta* by Victor Herbert. But while Civic Opera continued well into the 1950s, no more was heard of Empire Opera after its two

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[20]Later an M.L.A. in the Alberta cabinet.

[21]Later the first full-time paid Director of the Dominion Drama Festival.

productions.

During the 1935-36 theatre season,[22] a sixteen-week practical theatre arts series was co-sponsored by Edmonton Little Theatre and the University of Alberta Department of Extension under Elizabeth Sterling Haynes. *The Royal Touch* by Elsie Park Gowan was presented at the festival, directed by William Wallace for McDougall Church Young People; it placed second in the competition. The adjudicator was Emrys Jones[23]. In February 1938, just before the war, the Little Theatre mounted its first original full-length play – *The Last Caveman* by Elsie Park Gowan. And on April 21-23, *The Drunkard* (a temperance melodrama) was performed by the Belasco Players, directed by Mr. E. Maldwyn Jones and Mr. William R. Wallace. It was called "a hilarious success" (EJ Apr.22, 1938). The hero was played by Alan Macdonald and the villain by Stuart Carson. The two Clifton sisters were also in the play, which was billed as a return to the Gay Nineties.

Edmonton Little Theatre continued throughout the Second World War, and plays by both Elsie Park Gowan and Gwen Pharis Ringwood were produced locally. In *Rôle Call* (Jan.3,1941), Elsie Gowan wrote: "We are waiting for Gwen to put the north country into a play, as she put the prairie into *Still Stands the House*." Later, Ringwood did just that in *Widger's Way*.

Elsie ParkYoung (later Gowan) was born at Helensburgh, Scotland on

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[22] The same year in which drama was approved as a course in the junior and senior high schools.

[23] Later Head of the Department of Drama, University of Saskatchewan.

September 9, 1906 and came with her family to Edmonton when she was six years old. When she was sixteen, she began teaching in rural Alberta; she says that she wrote *The Hungry Spirit* "as a kind of protest against life in a small Alberta town."[24] Her father, who had obtained his degree at Edinburgh University, had lost his money in Edmonton, and they had to move to Bawlf, Alberta where he owned the local drugstore. When Elsie Young was twenty years old, she attended the University of Alberta, where she was influenced by Elizabeth Sterling Haynes, and she also became the women's editor of the *Gateway*, the student newspaper. She graduated in 1930 with a BA Honours degree in History. For four years, she taught outside Edmonton, and it was while she was at Lacombe that she wrote *Homestead*, which won honourable mention in the 1932 Carnegie Playwriting Competition, and which was performed by the Edmonton Little Theatre in 1933, directed by Dr. E.H. (Ted) Gowan, who was to become her husband later that year. Because Ted Gowan was a physics professor at the University of Alberta, Elsie Young came back to live in Edmonton. It was then that she began to write constantly. She was later to say of herself, and of Gwen Pharis Ringwood: "Gwen and I were both really subsidized by our husbands."[25] The two playwrights combined for the CKUA series *New Lamps for Old* in 1936-37, and Gowan was later to write another series independently for CKUA in 1938-39, called *The Building of Canada.* "The

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[24] Moira Jean Day, The Hungry Spirit: Selected Plays and Prose by Elsie Park Gowan, ed. with introduction and interviews (Newest Press, Edmonton, 1992), p. 66

[25] Day The Hungry Spirit, p.227

historical epic was to remain a staple of Gowan's later radio work"[26] And for this, she apparently gave some credit to the play *Cavalcade* by Noel Coward. Her own most successful historical pageant/drama was *The Jasper Story*.[27]

Elsie Park Gowan's series *The Barlows of Beaver Street* was broadcast on the CBC International Service to Britain, from November 1948 to June 1949. Altogether, she wrote more than two hundred dramatic pieces for theatre and radio. She also acted, both with the Edmonton Little Theatre and at the Studio Theatre; the present writer remembers acting with her at the Studio in *The Great Catherine* in 1953, and being a little over-awed by her statuesque demeanour, although still enjoying the experience! Elsie Gowan was very excited by the lectures of Frederick Koch at Banff, and "had hopes that the Banff School might prove the cradle for the kind of training and writing still missing from the mainstream Little Theatre movement."[28] In this she was disappointed, so turned more and more to radio as being "a far better instrument than the community theatre"[29] for a medium of social significance. After her husband died in 1958, she returned to teaching at Ross Sheppard High School until her retirement in 1971. After this, she continued teaching creative writing to seniors for a number of years, mainly at Strathcona Place.

The Understudy Club, which had been reorganized by senior members of the

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[26]Ibid. p.20

[27]Which is discussed under the subsidized (provincial government) heading.

[28]Day, The Hungry Spirit, p.15.

[29]Ibid, p.16

group, put on three one-acts in February 1938, in November 1939 and in March 1940. They had produced a satirical revue in April 1939, directed by Les Pilcher with Jack McCreath as one of the performers. In February, 1940, the Edmonton Little Theatre presented an evening of two one-acts in All Saints Cathedral's parish hall: *A Loss for Father*, a modern comedy by Elsie Park Gowan, and *Chris Axelson, Blacksmith*, about a Swedish blacksmith who saves for years to educate a talented nephew, by Gwen Pharis Ringwood. The director was Stuart Carson, who also had to fill in for another actor at the last minute. In February 1941, the Little Theatre put on one of J.B. Priestley's "time plays", *Time and the Conways*, directed by Mrs. Brinley Rees. A newspaper photograph (E.J. Feb.22, 1941) shows the two youngest members of the cast, Jack McCreath[30] and Maureen Higgins (later Unwin), playing respectively, Robin and Carol Conway.

Meanwhile, Eva Howard was still directing plays for the Edmonton Little Theatre, which were put on at either Westglen High School, the Empire Theatre or the Masonic Temple. On February 16, 1940 she had been presented with the Dominion Drama Festival Award for her work as founder of the Vic Drama Society, her annual play at the school, and her work in community theatre. She had directed *Lady Precious Stream*, by S.I. Hsiung, based on a traditional Chinese play for the Little Theatre, and was about to direct *Tony Draws a Horse*, to open on April 11, 1941. By this time, the Understudy Club had branched out into playwriting, with Gwen Pharis Ringwood suggesting methods of

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[30]Who became the Supervisor of Drama for the Department of Culture, Youth and Recreation, Province of Alberta in 1956.

study, and Inez MacDonald speaking on make-up and parties, at meetings held at the houses of both Jack Unwin and Les Pilcher. In October 1941, Sidney Risk, who had arrived at the university in July to take over the reins of the Department of Extension, directed *Ladies in Retirement* for the Little Theatre.

Then came a scandal which was to have repercussions for many years. Halfway through 1942, the sky fell on Edmonton's theatrical community with the announcement that charges had been laid against eight men, ranging from gross indecency to contributing to the delinquency of a juvenile (E.J. and E.B. Jul.29, 1942). All eight had been involved with theatre in Edmonton, two of them very closely. The more prominent of the two, Harvey Kagna, had been president of the Edmonton Little Theatre for the 1940-41 season. His play, *Today or Tomorrow* had been directed on March 18, 1939 by Elizabeth Sterling Haynes, who had also encouraged and assisted him with the writing. It had been mounted as an independent production. Kagna was also one of Mrs. Haynes' close connections to the Edmonton Jewish community. He was a member of the Hebrew Musical and Dramatic Society, and had acted in many plays at Talmud Torah school. On March 12, 1933, he had taken part in the play *Olam-Habe* by Sholem Aleichem. He also helped backstage with sets and make-up. One of the boys who gave evidence was quoted in the *Edmonton Journal* as saying that Kagna had also been the make-up artist for a local opera company.[31]

James Richardson was the second of the two charged who were prominent in

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[31]And indeed, while the Civic Opera went from strength to strength under Mrs. Carmichael, the Empire Opera, which had such great plans under Atha Andrew, had been caught up in the scandal and was never heard of again.

Edmonton theatre. In three one-act plays presented by St. Faith's Young People at Alberta Avenue Community Hall on April 14, 1939, Richardson had appeared in the Curtain Club's *Where the Cross is Made*. He also appeared in *Copy* by Kendall Banning, presented by Knox United Church on March 2 and 3, 1934. Later, Richardson had been closely involved with the Belasco Players; in addition to being a member of their board, he directed the chorus in *Aladdin*, produced at the Masonic Temple from January 24 to 27, 1940. When the Belasco Players produced the musical, *All Out: or A Boy's Best Friend is His Own Damn Business* in 1941, written by Clyde Gilmour and William R. Wallace, Richardson wrote five new songs for the show.

The court cases went on through September and October 1942; in the end, a number of charges were dismissed, but many others were upheld. The two heaviest sentences were given to Harvey Kagna, aged 37, who was sent to Prince Albert Penitentiary for three years, and James Richardson, aged 34, a former railway employee, sent to the Penitentiary for two years. Both men were represented by Abe W. Miller, K.C., a prominent Edmonton lawyer.[32] At a later hearing, on February 5, 1943, at which Kagna, then already serving his sentence, was acquitted of a new charge, he was represented by A.L. Smith, K.C. of Calgary. Most of the others who were charged and sentenced were sent to the provincial jail at Fort Saskatchewan. Charged with gross indecency was John Hoff, described as a Jasper hotel owner, who is listed in *Rôle Call* along with Harvey Kagna as a Patron of the 1940 to 1941 season of the Edmonton Little

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[32]And father of Tevie Miller, Q.C. whose wife, Arliss, was later on the board of the Citadel.

Theatre.[33]

Sterling Haynes, Mrs. Haynes' son, told Moira Day that Kagna was a close friend of his parents, who were devastated by these events. In 1953, Mrs. Haynes told the present writer and her husband that she had been summoned to court as a witness during the trial, and there was told by the Crown Prosecutor that she was a bad influence on young people, presumably because she was connected with the theatre. She also said that several of the teenagers who were connected at the time in any way with the Little Theatre, the Belasco Players or the Empire Opera were sent to Mexico by their parents so as to avoid being called upon to testify. In his summing-up of the cases, Chief Justice Ives said: ". . . [it] must be obvious [from] the evidence in the 4 trials this week that there is an organization . . . between here and Vancouver devoted to . . . this bestiality." (EJ and EB Sept.25, 1942)

The newspaper reports are typical of the period; nothing is spelled out, everything is simply hinted at, leaving the reader to imagine most of the actual offences. We do not know whether the sentences would have been the same today. The whole court case, however, must have been devastating to the general public, and even worse for the theatre people in the city. It is still difficult for people who were connected with theatre in Edmonton at the time to discuss the cases at any great length. One of the people interviewed knew about the cases, and said that the sister of one of the accused "never forgave him." Another person told me that "what they did to Jimmy Richardson

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[33]Hoff's patronage was on behalf of S.S. Kresge Co. Ltd., of which he was the Edmonton manager.

was a disgrace." It is safe to say that this scandal, although it was hushed up, was responsible for the fact that Edmonton theatre took much longer to be fully accepted and supported after the Second World War than, for instance, the Calgary theatre organizations Workshop 14 and Calgary Civic Theatre. Undoubtedly, in the minds of many non-theatrical Edmontonians, here was living proof that theatre people were still rogues and vagabonds, of whom "decent" people should steer clear. For example, there was also the fact that Harvey Kagna was a close friend of Elizabeth Sterling Haynes and her husband Nelson. This, combined with Haynes' support of the Council for Canadian-Soviet Friendship, may well have stood in the way of her advancement at the University of Alberta in later years.[34]

Of course, there were still people to whom the theatre was the breath of life, one of whom was Mickey (Marguerite) Macdonald. In the 1930s, she and her sister Vernis, together with their mother, Faith Clifton, had been very active members of the Edmonton Little Theatre. The sisters had appeared on stage both together and individually. In December, 1936 Mickey had had her first big dramatic role with the Little Theatre, as Mary Boyle in Sean O'Casey's *Juno and the Paycock*, directed by Charles Sweetlove. In 1937, Mickey appeared in the city-wide drama festival in the play *Mansions*, presented under the auspices of The Young Thespians, for which she was awarded an acting medal. The young actors were congratulated for their "audibility, diction and grouping" (EJ Mar 9, 1937). The following year both Mickey and her sister were in *The Slave With Two Faces*, by the Norwood Young People's Society, and Mrs. Laura

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[34]Day, ESH, p.450-451

Salverson, the adjudicator, remarked that "Edmonton will one day have reason to be extremely proud of Marguerite Clifton." In fact, Mickey Macdonald was in one or more plays each year, winning trophies for those entered in festivals. She also appeared in musicals, as Morgiana in *Ali Baba and the Forty Thieves* in the spring of 1937, and as Princess PeeChee in a Belasco Players' production of *Aladdin* at the Masonic Temple in January 1940. This was a modern interpretation, co-authored by William Wallace and Clyde Gilmour. In 1941, she appeared as Ariel in *The Tempest*, directed by Les Pilcher, also at the Masonic Temple, January 8-10. Furthermore, Professor Salter, of the University of Alberta's English Department, wrote a review in which he said:. "Ariel is an actress from toes to crown" (RC Feb.17,1941).

By this time, the war had begun, and with her husband Alan Macdonald overseas, Mickey left Edmonton in the fall of 1943 to study at the American Academy of Dramatic Arts in New York. She felt the need to try her wings in a wider theatrical world. All her life, she had been given plum roles and had been praised for them, but understandably, she needed the commendation of directors, fellow actors and audiences whom she had not known all her life. She also undoubtedly felt that she needed further training. She did not stay at the Academy for the full year, and in March 1944 she was the understudy in a support rôle in George Abbott's 0production of *A Highland Fling* and was later understudying the lead. They opened in Boston with Mickey in the role of Lizzie McGregor, where she was said to be "lending fine support" (EJ Mar. 3, 1944). In December 1944, she was understudy to Tony Gilman in a Broadway play, *Men to the Sea* by Herbert Kubley, directed by Eddie Dowling. When Miss Gilman suddenly fell ill,

Mickey Macdonald took over the part, acting under her maiden name, Marguerite Clifton. The reviewer in *Mayfair* magazine wrote, in a fairly lengthy review, that "Canada will hear more of this promising daughter"(*Mayfair* Dec.1944). By this time, Alan was on his way back to Edmonton, but before Mickey came back to join him, she appeared in *Sophie* by Rose Feld, directed by Michael Gordon. During the periods when she was not in a play, she says that she worked as a model for the Powers Agency in New York.

When she came back to Edmonton, Mickey Macdonald wrote an article for *Rôle Call* in which she stressed the words "stay HOME". She made several points for young, ambitious actors: "You do not have to spend a small fortune at an Academy of Drama. . . People tell me I was lucky . . . [they] forget I had spent seven years practicing and training right here at home" (CEA 40A M135 RC Dec. 1945). This particular point of view is very individual-specific, but it does show the valuable experience which Mickey Macdonald felt she had already had in Edmonton. It could, of course, be argued that it was the going-away which had enlarged her vision and experience, so that she had come home richer in both skill and understanding of life. Meanwhile, the group with which she had worked in the city had been having its own troubles; but, in spite of having had severe monetary problems during the 1930s, the Edmonton Little Theatre company had decided, as far as possible, to continue throughout the war. In January 1942 the group held their one-act festival, which included Elsie Park Gowan's play *Back to the Kitchen, Woman!*. For January 6-8, 1943, the Little Theatre picked up a Belasco type of

melodrama, *Dirty Work at the Crossroads, or Tempted, Tried and True*,[35] with the lead played by Jack Unwin. It may be suggested that the Little Theatre's "high-toned" choices of plays seemed to be going towards the more frivolous, but this is very understandable in wartime; people need circuses as well as bread. In April 1944, on the verge of a turning-point in the war – the long-hoped-for invasion of France – the City Drama Festival was held for the first time since 1938. Five groups entered, and one of the plays was directed by Elizabeth Sterling Haynes for the war-time Allied Arts Council[36] – *Until Pierre Comes Marching Home* (this, presumably, because France was still occupied by German troops).

Sidney Risk played the lead in *Night Must Fall* by Emlyn Williams, beginning on February 29, 1944. This was a part which Risk had played in English repertory, and it was his first and only acting appearance with Edmonton Little Theatre. In December 1944, with the war finally drawing to a close, *Rôle Call* announced that there would be a series of classes on aspects of theatre, two to be conducted by Elizabeth Sterling Haynes and Gwen Pharis Ringwood, sponsored by the Little Theatre.

The Empire Theatre, which had been out of commission since 1943, reopened on Boxing Day 1944 with the Little Theatre production of *The Late Christopher Bean* by Sidney Howard, directed by Eva O. Howard. The program says that the play is "Miss Howard's first show in this theatre since the Restoration naughtiness of *And So to Bed*"

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[35]Interestingly, this was the first of Walterdale's melodramas in March, 1963.

[36]This first Allied Arts Council had been founded by Dr. George Hunter, during the Second World War, assisted by Mrs. Haynes. It was the Allied Arts (War Services) Council (affiliated with the War Services Council of Northern Alberta).

by J.B. Fagan, and adds that "this lady is the main reason for packed houses at V.H.S. (Victoria High School) school plays." In the play were Jack Wilson, as the lead, Gwen Seller (re-playing her part from Victoria High School), Olga Laruska (also from Vic, playing her first Little Theatre rôle), and Farnham Howarth. The publicity was handled by Faith Clifton, the program by Elsie Park Gowan, and the photography by Ted Gowan. The review, signed L.D.W. said that the "the capable group of actors turned Sidney Howard's comedy into a well-packed laugh fest"(EJ Dec. 27, 1944), and it singled out "three outstanding performances" – Gwen Seller, Jack Wilson and Becky Glockzin.

But it was becoming less viable to do plays in large spaces such as the Empire Theatre. In May 1939, Alan Macdonald, the retiring president of the Little Theatre, had proposed that the board of syndics "not try to produce three plays in the Empire Theatre, but choose smaller theatres for several more productions . . ."(EJ May 23, 1939) Indeed, some of the reviews were not helpful and may have contributed to the lack of audience for many of the plays. In March, 1945, the Edmonton Little Theatre staged Thornton Wilder's *The Skin of Our Teeth* at the Empire Theatre, directed by Sidney Risk, featuring Elsie Park Gowan, Sue Laycock, and Dr. E.S. Keeping, all of whom were experienced actors who continued working in Edmonton theatre. But the reviewer was at a loss as to explain the plot to readers, saying how different it was from *Our Town!* (EJ Mar.10, 1945) Although the review was scathing, Diana Fryth Ewing,

who had played the part of Mrs. Antrobus, received the Kerr Trophy[37] later that spring for the best acting performance of the year.

By this time, Faith Clifton was President of the Little Theatre. In 1944, there were eight entries for the Little Theatre One-act Drama Festival, which indicated a healthy situation for local theatre; however, problems lay ahead. A year later, in March 1945, it was announced that, since only two entries had been received for the festival, it had been called off (EJ Mar.31, 1945). There was, obviously, more at stake than a cancellation of the festival, since on May 15 that year a general meeting of the group was announced to decide whether the Edmonton Little Theatre "will continue its dramatic activities", and also to arrange a "reorganisation of the group if it is decided to carry on"(EJ May 15, 1945). Three days later, it was agreed in principle at a meeting that the name of Edmonton Little Theatre should be changed to either Civic or Community Theatre; this was to be decided at the fall meeting. (EJ.May 18,1945) Finally, on October 25,1945, the name was changed to Edmonton Community Theatre, and a new board of directors was elected, with Alan Macdonald and Faith Clifton as president and production head respectively.

A change of name seems in retrospect a rather drastic reaction to a bad review and a lack of festival entries in a given year. At the open meeting in May, Faith Clifton spoke of the group's activities generally, and asked whether the Little Theatre's

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[37]The Dr. W.A.R. Kerr Trophy, donated annually by the President of the University of Alberta, to the actor or actress giving the best individual performance of the season. Others who won it in different years included Elsie Park Gowan, Mickey Macdonald, and Stuart Carson.

continuing existence was worth the "time and effort". No real reason seems to have been advanced for the change of name, unless the answer lies in residual fallout from the theatre "scandal" of 1942. Those who were around in Edmonton theatre at the time, and who have been interviewed for this thesis, are of the opinion that there *was* a connection in the public mind between the 1942 "goings-on" and Edmonton theatre in general, and that the Edmonton Little Theatre wanted to cut its ties to its prewar identity. People nowadays may wonder why a scandal in one small section of one group had such an effect on the rest of the theatrical community. It must be remembered that Edmonton was a comparatively small city of about 92,000 people at the time, and the arts community spanned a varied and esoteric group of people. Admittedly, productions of various kinds went on throughout the war, and the war itself provided a kind of hiatus but not a forgetfulness; a mere suspension, not a cutoff. The connection to scandal would be denied by some of the remaining members of the Little Theatre; indeed, a change of name had been discussed for some years beforehand.

There was also another problem: "The Little Theatre had become dominated by a small clique who appeared in all the productions ... [but] it was always the lack of a theatre that hurt the company the most"[38] In the same month that it was decided that the company's name should be changed, Eva Howard had written an article for *Rôle Call*, in which she had made an impassioned plea for a total re-thinking of priorities. She wrote of being "fed up with rehearsing in frigid garages" and also said that "the present administrative set-up is unwieldy." She wrote that the Little Theatre needed to

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[38]Stuart, E. Ross. The History of Prairie Theatre. Toronto: Simon and Pierre, 1984. p.103

pare down the "working executive of 12 people" to "a management committee of, maybe three, holding office for 3 years, who would plan the policy." It is of particular interest that Howard believed that "if we are to carry on, we must have two things that we've never had before: 'A permanent building and a sustained policy'" (CEA A96-152 RC May 1945).

The reorganized group, Edmonton Community Theatre, mounted a strong first production: Noel Coward's *Blithe Spirit*, directed by Laurier Picard. It was presented at the Masonic Temple on December 5, 6, and 7, 1945. In the cast were Mickey Macdonald, now back for good from New York, Elsie Park Gowan, Inez MacDonald, and Jack Wilson. Dick MacDonald designed the set, and Jack Unwin ran lights. Elsie Park Gowan was later awarded the Kerr Trophy for her performance as Ruth, although Mickey Macdonald, as Elvira, was praised for the "poise" and "finesse" she had acquired in New York (EB Dec. 7, 1945).

Dick MacDonald was for many years a producer and announcer for the radio station, CKUA. From 1946 to 1950 he was the Co-Ordinator of Cultural Activities for the Government of Alberta. During his time in Edmonton, both he and his wife Inez worked on many plays for the Little Theatre, then for the Community Theatre. He was the grandson of the novelist George MacDonald, his father was stage manager for Sir Frank Benson's company in England in the early 1890s, and his aunt was an actress, Constance Forbes-Robertson. MacDonald was both an actor and an excellent stage designer – for three summers he taught stagecraft at the Banff School of Fine Arts. His wife was both an actress and a make-up artist for many local productions. Dick

MacDonald left Edmonton in 1950 for the important position of Secretary of the Dominion Drama Festival.

G.J. Baril and Laurier Picard, the head of drama at St. Joseph's High School, both directed and acted for the French theatre in Edmonton - Le Cercle Dramatique Molière - as well as the Little/Community Theatre. In March 1937, G.J. Baril was in a production of *La Séparation*, which so moved the audience that "there were many wet eyes as the curtain rang down on the heart-broken, sobbing cries of Monsieur G.J. Baril as 'Jacquot'"(EJ. Mar 9, 1937) Another person in the cast was Mme Blanche Lambert, mother of Marcel Lambert, who was later a Conservative federal M.P. and Cabinet Minister. Much later, Laurier Picard and Joe Shoctor were both in *The Man Who Came To Dinner* by George S. Kaufman. They both "gave insignificant parts an [sic] hilarious treatment," and Shoctor "brought the house down"(E.J. Dec.11, 1946) This play was called the Community Theatre's sixtieth production - counting from the beginning of the Little Theatre. There was an odd miscalculation in the numbering . The *Edmonton Journal* of December 4, 1947 speaks of *Ladies of the Jury* being the Community Theatre's sixty-first production. One might ask about *My Heart's In the Highlands* by William Saroyan, which was performed in March, 1947 between the two preceding productions but was apparently not included in the numbering. This may have been because the production was composed of scenes from the play and not the full show.[39]

With the Saroyan play, the Edmonton Little Theatre entered the Dominion Drama Festival for the first time since the war. Eva Howard's production of *My*

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[39]The D.D.F. was not yet allowing full-length plays.

Heart's In the Highlands was first shown at the Edmonton Sub-regional Drama Festival at Garneau High School Auditorium on February 11 and 12, 1947, where it was adjudicated by Betty Mitchell. Since she judged it to be the best play, it was next seen in Edmonton at the Alberta Regional Drama Festival, which took place at Convocation Hall on the University of Alberta campus on March 22, 1947. Here it was adjudicated by Robert Orchard, who also judged it to be the best play, and who gave the Kerr Trophy award to Frank Holroyd[40] for his portrayal of Mr. McGregor, an old Shakespearean actor. Orchard called the production "an excellently-directed performance, smooth and moving, yet never too serious" (EJ. Mar. 24, 1947). The play then went to London, Ontario for the Dominion Drama Festival finals, still with the original cast: Stewart Kerby as the young son, Jack Wilson, an Edmonton Little Theatre member since the early 1940s,[41] Bob Folinsbee and Frank Holroyd. Frank Glenfield was with Calgary's Workshop 14 group at the finals in May, 1947, and saw the production of the Saroyan play at the London Little Theatre. He said that *My Heart's in the Highlands* was one of the most beautiful productions he had ever seen. The casting and the sets together brought the play to life, and the part of the young boy was played with sincerity and sensitivity. Overall, he felt that the play "had a sense of magic about it."

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[40]He had worked closely with Elizabeth Sterling Haynes in the University Dramatic Society and the Edmonton Little Theatre, as a designer, director and performer, and later on, was for many years, on the staff of the Drama Department of the University of Saskatchewan.

[41]His young daughter, Josephine, took her first theatrical steps in this play.

Another person whose name comes up regularly in the Community Theatre productions is Blake MacKenzie, who became the co-ordinator of the Province of Alberta's Cultural Activities Branch in 1950, succeeding Richard MacDonald in that position. It is interesting to note that Walter Kaasa, who in turn succeeded Blake MacKenzie at Alberta Culture, was also involved with Edmonton theatre, both with the early years of Theatre Associates and with Studio Theatre in its early and later periods.

So the 1940s were drawing to a close, with the Edmonton Community Theatre having survived both the earlier scandal and its change of name. In the 1947-48 season Elsie Park Gowan gave courses on playwriting for the group, and Alan Macdonald, later Edmonton's City Solicitor, directed the production of *The Merchant of Venice* from March 2-5, 1948 at the U.S.O. building, which later became the city's Recreation Building.[42] Mickey Macdonald played Portia, Dick MacDonald was Bassanio, Stuart Carson was Shylock, Olga Laruska played his daughter Jessica, and Les Pilcher played Old Gobbo.

In April 1948, Elizabeth Sterling Haynes directed the production of scenes from *Victoria Regina* by Laurence Housman, which won four of the seven acting awards at the provincial festival. The production was invited to the Dominion Drama Festival finals in Ottawa, in spite of having come in a close second to Calgary's Workshop 14, which was also invited. But finances were a problem, and a letter written by the President of the Community Theatre, Margery MacKenzie,[43] appeared in the April 5,

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[42]Still later to be known as "the old rec. building".

[43]Blake MacKenzie's cousin.

1948 issue of the *Edmonton Journal*. MacKenzie successfully pleaded for donations to the group's travel expenses to be sent to Canada Permanent Mortgage Company. She cited the inability of the Company to build up any profits because of its "pitifully small auditorium" in the 430-seat Edmonton Recreation Commission Hall, where the Centennial Building now stands. By the end of the decade, it was still true that the Community Theatre was the only theatrical game in town. But there were other outlets for performances by local actors; these outlets included radio drama.

In 1921, H.P. Brown, who was in charge of the Visual Aids department of the University of Alberta, had built a receiving set to tune in to stations from the United States and Canada, sometimes even Mexico. Brown was fascinated by radio's possibilities, suggested setting up a University radio station, and CKUA went on the air for the first time on November 21, 1927. Brown, its first announcer and studio manager, and Sheila Marryat, the first program manager, established the CKUA Players. Mrs. J.B. Carmichael of the Edmonton Civic Opera conducted the 20-piece CKUA radio orchestra. In the first acting company were Inez and Dick MacDonald, Charles Sweetlove, Les Pilcher, Frances Garness, Farnham Howarth, Sue Laycock, and C.A. Davidson. Most of these people also acted for the Edmonton Little Theatre. Two of the writers for the CKUA Players were Elsie Park Gowan and Gwen Pharis Ringwood. "Gowan and Ringwood remember their work on *New Lamps for Old*. . . as valuable training for a future playwriting career."[44]

Another group, the CJCA Players began in 1943. In Canadian National Theatre

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[44]Day, The Hungry Spirit, p.12

on the Air, Doug Homersham is listed as the CJCA producer of the play *New Canadians* by Magdalena Eggleston, broadcast on April 11, 1944. In 1948, the Blue Flame Theatre began as a joint venture by radio stations CFAC in Calgary and CJCA in Edmonton. CFAC's Clarence Mack in Calgary, using Radio Workshop 14[45], and CJCA's Doug Homersham in Edmonton, put on alternating productions, CFAC's comprised mainly of Workshop 14 actors, and CJCA's of actors from the Community Theatre. The Blue Flame season ran from January 18 to April 14, 1948. Both CFAC and CJCA radio shows continued for many years, under names other than Blue Flame. Tony Cashman wrote constantly for CJCA. His first program, broadcast on August 31, 1951 was a 30-minute special to mark the end of the streetcar era in Edmonton. During the ten years between October 12, 1951, and April 5, 1961, Cashman wrote 726 "Edmonton Stories" for CJCA.

Meanwhile, the legitimate theatre was still active in the city. In 1945, the Edmonton Community Theatre had risen like a phoenix from the ashes of the Edmonton Little Theatre, and had begun a new identity, with offshoots such as The Understudy Club. These groups had set a standard and awakened an appetite for good theatre, but were obviously comparatively closed affairs. The Clifton family, Faith, Vernis, Mickey and Alan Macdonald, plus their supporters in the Community Theatre, including Audrey Grisdale,[46]were prominent in Edmonton theatre. Although this was undoubtedly due to

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[45]An offshoot of Calgary's Workshop 14 theatre company.

[46]Who was an invaluable asset to the backstage workings of the company, in any capacity in which the group wanted to use her.

talent, many of the younger people connected with these theatre organizations saw this group of people as a collective family compact, and were understandably anxious to make their own mark in theatre. The end of the decade arrived with September tryouts for the Community Theatre's first play of the 1949-50 season, *The Winslow Boy* by Terence Rattigan. The play was directed by Charles Sweetlove, who had been a long-time Edmonton Little Theatre actor, and who later acted at the university's Studio Theatre.

In February 1950, a small dent was made in the long-established local theatrical scene by an unlikely group calling itself the British Commonwealth Players. They mounted a play called *Now Is The Hour*, written and produced by Peter Greaves of Edmonton, at the Recreation Hall, for the nights of February 24- 25, 1950. No more seems to have been heard of this group, but it has the honour of being in the vanguard of the 1950s.

It seems that, although community theatre in Edmonton was well established by the 1930s, there was a greater burgeoning of theatre in the 1950s and the early 1960s. Perhaps it was part of the general relief that there was no world conflict in sight, and that money was beginning to flow freely in the Alberta capital. There were also many new people who had come into the city from overseas, especially from Britain, from the United States, and from other parts of Canada. These new people simply wanted to make theatre, they had no history of jealousy of each other, or of internecine strife in the theatrical community.

In 1950, a few Edmontonians had a sudden desire for an open-air theatre, a

"theatre under the stars" similar to the one in Stanley Park, Vancouver. A group calling itself Edmonton Amphitheatre Ltd., represented by J.H. Ogilvie, floated the scheme. The idea was tossed around for months – the seating capacity, the lease of the land at the east end of Victoria Park, the number of shares, and the construction costs. Then, at a meeting in January 1951, a City Council Finance Committee met to discuss all the details of lights, water, sewer, roads, and the general use of the space for operettas, summer festivals, and band concerts (EJ.Jan. 18, 1951). But the discussions eventually ended, and no more was heard of the idea.[47]

In the fall of 1951, a new theatre group was formed named the Civil Service Playhouse. Their first play, *The Barretts of Wimpole Street* by Rudolph Besier, was performed at the Recreation Hall, and reviewed by the *Journal* (EJ.Nov 30,1951). The play was directed by a determined Englishwoman, Marjorie Buckley, who had gathered a large group of workers around her. Not only was the group supported wholeheartedly by the Honorable A.J. Hooke, Minister of Economic Affairs in the provincial government, the minister responsible for Culture, but the players were given permission to rehearse in one of the upstairs rooms of the Alberta Legislative Building. In the leads were Tim Byrne, a high school inspector;[48] Mary Baldock (later Glenfield) the present

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[47]Years later, and with no apparent connection, a shell and amphitheatre were built in Hawrelak Park, which, at the time of the original proposition in 1950, was just swampland on the way down to the river. The present Hawrelak Park theatre shell is now in constant use over the summer by groups such as the River City Shakespeare Festival, the Jazz City Festival, and the Edmonton Symphony.

[48]Who won an award the following January for his part at the Alberta Regional Drama Festival in Edmonton.

worked for the provincial government; and Tom Summers, a school teacher who earlier that year had played in *The Tempest,* directed by Robert Orchard at the Studio Theatre. During the intermission of *The Barretts of Wimpole Street,* Mr. Hooke spoke to the audience, and outlined the functions of the Cultural Activities Branch, then introduced its co-ordinator, Blake MacKenzie,[49]who had been appointed successor to Dick MacDonald. The Civil Service Playhouse mounted the play *Claudia* by Rose Franken at the Recreation Hall on October 22, 1952, and in 1953 the group put on two more plays — *Tobias and the Angel* by James Bridie, and *The Sacred Flame* by Somerset Maugham.[50] Marjorie Buckley directed all of these Civil Service Playhouse productions.

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Blake MacKenzie was a colourful character, who always went out on a limb with the provincial government to get funding for various arts groups. Later, after he had left the government, he and Johnny Langdon, the past head of CKUA, formed a sort of bush pilots company to fly people such as film crews and tourists into the Nahanni Valley ("Death Valley"). They were finally lost, and rescued, there. A year later, Blake, flying alone, went down again in the same Death Valley. His plane was found, but he was not; he left a wife, Ruth, and a daughter, Donna. In the late 1960s Stephen Franklin wrote an article in *Weekend Magazine* about Blake's disappearance in the Nahanni Valley, which raised some questions as to whether he had in fact got out alive. His logbook was found up-to-date, there was still food in the plane, there were no signs of struggle with an animal, and there was a road not too far from the downed plane. Many years later, Walter Kaasa (who had been aware for some time that Blake now lived in the southern United States, where he owned a bookstore) was informed that Blake had died. Walter was invited to the funeral, but was unable to go. This was at the beginning of the 1980s, but Kaasa cannot remember the exact date.

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During rehearsals for the latter play, Robert Orchard was directing Bernard Shaw's *The Great Catherine* for the Studio Theatre, with Elsie Park Gowan playing the title rôle. One of the other actresses, Hazel Benson, came down with chickenpox during the run; Orchard, in desperation, asked the present writer to get out of her rehearsals for *The Sacred Flame* in order to fill in for Benson in one day. The learning of lines and one-person rehearsal went on all day at the Studio, with a cast rehearsal on the Monday. Then the play went on for the rest of theweek. This was certainly a case of one group borrowing from another.

In 1955, Faith Clifton, her daughter Mickey Macdonald, and their longtime friend and associate, Audrey Grisdale, formed a new theatre group called Circle Eight. This new group was not simply a change of name from the now-limping Community Theatre (which in 1945 had simply taken over the Little Theatre membership and assets), although the board members comprised many people who had belonged to the other two groups. Some of the other names in the new Circle Eight were Jack Cahan, Stuart Carson, Dorothy Galloway, Doug Homersham, Dick Locke, Ernie Mutimer, Les Pilcher, John Rivet, and Grant Smith.[51] The initial production of Circle Eight was *The Heiress* by Ruth and Augustus Goetz, directed by Dick Locke, with Mickey Macdonald in the lead (EJ Mar 1, 1955). The play was put on in the Victoria Composite High School Auditorium; it then went on to the Alberta Regional Drama Festival. After this, the play went on tour to various Alberta towns. The long-term plan for Circle Eight was to become a semi-professional organization, its participants drawn from a tightly-knit, core group of members. To say that Circle Eight rose from the ashes of the Edmonton Community Theatre is perhaps leaping to conclusions, and no one ever claimed this. However, it is a fact that after Circle Eight was created, no more was ever heard of Community Theatre productions. As it happened, Circle Eight came into being ten years after the Community Theatre itself had emerged from the Little Theatre.

Meanwhile, and almost unnoticed, two other new groups had been formed. In 1952, Leslie and Julie Wiles, who had arrived from England the previous year, formed the

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Unfortunately, Mickey Macdonald can only remember four members of the original Circle of Eight: Mickey herself, Faith Clifton, Dick Locke and Jack McCreath.

Cottage Players as a play-reading group. The Wiles house was located at 106 Street and 99 Avenue, and the play-readings took place in the "cottage" at the bottom of the garden, which was the former ice-house on the old Secord property. Macdonald Knowler and his wife Marjorie lived next door, and for one of the play-readings, Les Wiles had rigged up wiring from his living room to the Knowlers'. People had been invited to come and listen to a radio show which, unknown to the listeners, was actually being read at the Knowlers' and heard on the Wiles' radio next door. The play was called *The Mummy's Foot.* Only one of the Cottage plays was ever put into full production. *Shall We Join the Ladies?*, a one-act play by J.M. Barrie, directed by Tim Seymour, was produced at Convocation Hall, University of Alberta on March 26, 1955 as part of the Edmonton Drama Council/Alberta Drama League one-act festival, held there on March 25 and 26. By this time, the Knowlers had created a group called Court Players, to produce as well as read plays. Although the original Court group was not drawn from the Cottage Players, the latter group virtually disappeared, thereafter holding only sporadic readings at the Wiles' house.

The first play produced by Court Players, on October 18 –19, 1957, was *Night Must Fall* by Emlyn Williams at Victoria Composite auditorium. When the company tried to put on *Outward Bound* at the Yardbird Suite, they were ejected by the Fire Marshal because the space had not been approved for large audiences. Luckily, Gordon Peacock came to the rescue, and the play ran at the Studio Theatre's Quonset hut, opening on February 10, 1958 .

Michael Porcsa directed Ibsen's *Ghosts* for Court Players at the Jubilee

Auditorium on January 22, 1959, for the Alberta Regional Drama Festival section of the Dominion Drama League regional finals. Marjorie Knowler and Frank Glenfield played Mrs. Alving and Pastor Manders. They were placed on opposite sides of the stage and were never allowed to come anywhere near each other in the tense scenes. This made the playing of these scenes very difficult. A script-reader was also engaged to read along *sotto voce* with the actors, not only in rehearsals but during the production. Porcza, however, was forced to abandon this when his actors simply couldn't remember their lines during rehearsals with this droning voice going along underneath them.[52] The whole thing caused amazement in the audience, particularly on the part of the adjudicator, Betty Mitchell, who was Frank Glenfield's former drama teacher.

Probably the funniest play ever mounted by Court Players was Terence Rattigan's *Harlequinade*. Marjorie Knowler, Don Biamonte and Elsa Houba were the leads, with Tony Rowland as a lost young spear-carrier (UAA 73-140 File l6.5.5.4 Box 2 CWTG). This play won the Alberta Drama League Festival, which was held on March 9 and 10, 1956 at the Victoria Composite High School auditorium. It then went to the Provincial Finals in Red Deer that summer. In 1960, the play was remounted for the Edmonton Summer Arts Festival.

Circle Eight put on a production of the hilarious English clerical comedy *See How They Run*, directed by John Rivet, December 7–9, 1955. The names in the cast show

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Ida Bueckert, the wife of Frank Bueckert, who was on the staff of the university's Department of Drama, said that her mother — who was of Hungarian birth — knew these conventions well, and enjoyed them.

something of a crossover between Court Players and Circle Eight. It may also show that there was still a limited number of actors available in the city. In the cast were Frank Glenfield, Marjorie and Macdonald Knowler, Don Biamonte, and Albin Shanley. Noel Coward's *Present Laughter* opened the 1956-1957 Circle Eight season to a nearly full house at the Victoria High School auditorium It was ". . . an evening of bright wit and occasionally hilarious farce " (EJ Nov. 16, 1956). It also marked the first appearance on stage of Jack McCreath since his return to his home town. He had returned from England to assume the new position of Drama Supervisor for the Alberta Cultural Activities Branch. Mickey Macdonald both directed and acted in the play. Others in the cast were Isadore Gliener, Wally McSween, Mary Glenfield, and Arlene McMicking (later Dafoe).

The first night of *Present Laughter* had filled the house, but too often on other nights the audiences had looked very sparse. This was not true of Theatre for Children, which packed the same auditorium with eager youngsters. Other groups such as Court Players had often used the Recreation Hall on 100 Street and 102 Avenue, which had more limited seating and thus no vast, empty spaces in the audience. Studio Theatre, of course, was still producing plays in its Quonset hut, which had a smaller seating capacity than the Recreation Hall. For years there had been much weeping and gnashing of teeth if a play was unable to draw a big enough audience to fill a large space such as the Victoria Composite High School 750-seat auditorium. On January 13, 1958, the Canadian Women's Theatre Guild called a meeting of Edmonton theatre groups to discuss

the future of theatre in Edmonton, which shows that audience numbers were causing some concern in the theatre community. But the first major break from the old way of doing things (playing to the largest audience possible) came in September, 1958. Jack McCreath believed that there was an audience ready and waiting for good theatre, if one could tap into it. He was a vibrant young man, who had trained with Michel St. Denis in London. He was also brilliantly musical and he had an understanding and background knowledge both of theatre in general and of the possibilities for Edmonton theatre in particular. McCreath's initiative was to schedule two plays in repertory: his own musical *Out of the Frying Pan*, and the melodrama *Lady Audley's Secret*, to be performed under a new name: Theatre Associates. He directed both plays, working with Mac and Marjorie Knowler, Wally McSween, Frank and Mary Glenfield, Georgie Collins, Roman Charnetski, Larry Hertzog, and Irma Rowland. These plays were put on for a week from August 27,1958 in the Social Room of the Jubilee Auditorium.[53] This space had an inadequate stage and lighting and a limited number of seats, but was much easier to fill than either the auditorium at Victoria Composite High School, or the main stage of the Jubilee Auditorium. There was no particular intention of making this a new group in Edmonton, nor of using the name beyond these two productions.

In March 1959, Circle Eight produced Gore Vidal's sortie into cyberspace, *Visit to a Small Planet*, directed by Frank Glenfield with Jack Wilson in the lead. Wilson had not acted for ten years since the days of the Little and Community Theatres, when he had

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[53]Re-designed in 1983 as the Walter H. Kaasa Theatre.

appeared in so many of their plays under the name John R. Wilson. Elaine Polovnikoff played the female lead. Also in the play were a number of younger cast and crew members who had been part of the opening week of the Jubilee Auditorium in May 1957. But, in spite of the fact that *Visit to a Small Planet* had very good reviews[54], all was not well with the younger members of Circle Eight. For several years they had felt that they were being used as "extras" merely to showcase the talents of the more established actors, and more particularly those who belonged to the Circle Eight executive. These young people told the director that there *had* to be a new group formed to give burgeoning young talent more of a chance. But Frank Glenfield was very reluctant at that point to disrupt a group for whom he was directing a play.

But the idea did not go away, and the stirrings of discontent grew more insistent. This was a repetition of the complaints voiced by the younger members of the Little Theatre in the late 1940s. Two months later, on May 13, 1959, *Mister Roberts* by Thomas Heggen and Joshua Logan "sailed on stage in the Jubilee Auditorium", led by "Director Jack McCreath and his 40 bell-bottom trousered colleagues."(EJ May 14,1959). The reviewer wrote that Walter Kaasa was "terrific" and "marvellous"as the captain, and the comedy deserved "a 21-gun salute". Also in the cast were Wally McSween, Larry Trahan, Bud D'Amur, and Larry Hertzog.[55] By this time, the calls for changes to Circle

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[54] "[It] deserves an enthusiastic reception by Edmonton audiences. . . . the lighting and special effects were of professional calibre. . . Director Frank Glenfield merits well deserved congratulations."(EJ Mar 14,1959)

[55] Later, D'Amur and Hertzog were among the founders of Walterdale Theatre Associates.

Eight had become more insistent, and most of the people associated with them were in *Mister Roberts*. Rightly or wrongly, the perception was that Circle Eight, as well as the earlier Little/Community Theatres, was effectively controlled by the Cliftons and their loyal theatre friends, particularly Audrey Grisdale. Once again, this gave the impression to many of the younger people of "a family compact." So Jack McCreath resurrected the name he had used for his repertory plays the previous year, and on May 13, 1960, Edmonton Theatre Associates was incorporated under the signatures of Jack McCreath, Roman Charnetski, Larry Hertzog, Vera Rourke, Margaret Tewnion, and Bud D'Amur, with Connie Hertzog as witness. Most of the early members of the group had been in the *Saturday Night Show*, the final production of the Jubilee Auditorium opening week in 1957, with direction and musical composition by Jack McCreath.[56]

Despite a certain rivalry, companies continued to share actors. During the 1959-1960 and 1960-1961 seasons, Circle Eight and Theatre Associates seemed to be running in tandem with each other, sometimes with the same players. In March 1960, Joe Shoctor directed *Born Yesterday* by Garson Kanin for Circle Eight on the Jubilee Auditorium main stage. Mickey Macdonald played the lead, and others in the cast included Vernis Christie (née Clifton) and Wally McSween. In May 1960, Frank Glenfield directed *The Reluctant Debutante* by William Douglas Home for Theatre Associates on the Auditorium main stage, Jack Wilson and Mary Glenfield playing the

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[56] Theatre Associates has always dated its years from the first repertory plays in the Jubilee Auditorium Social Room in 1958.

leads, with Barry Vogel and Susan McFarlane.

Two productions the following fall really began to illustrate the criss-crossing of actors among theatre groups in the city. On October 19 of the new 1960 -1961 season, Theatre Associates staged *My Sister Eileen,* directed by Jack McCreath, on the Jubilee Auditorium main stage, with Wally McSween, Hutch Shandro,[57] Larry Hertzog, Georgie Collins, and Barry Vogel. Subsequently, on November 16, Mickey Macdonald directed *Auntie Mame,* by Jerome Lawrence and Robert E.Lee[58] for Circle Eight on the Auditorium main stage, with Vernis Christie, Hutch Shandro, Frank Glenfield, Wally McSween, and Mary Glenfield, with Agnes Gooch played by René Iles, from Calgary's Workshop 14 cast.[59] Unfortunately, Circle Eight's production of *Auntie Mame* was plagued with difficulties and dissension. In fact, the actors were constantly dropping out, with one of them throwing his script across the floor during a rehearsal to announce his withdrawal from the play. There were also tensions and arguments between the two Clifton sisters about the costumes, about the direction of the play, and about the emphasis on any characters other than Mame. The play was surprisingly successful, but

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[57] A University of Alberta Drama student, later going to the London Academy of Music and Dramatic Art.

[58] From the book by Patrick Dennis.

[59] The previous June 8, the Circle Eight annual spring banquet and annual general meeting had been held at the King Edward Hotel, and the group had booked a block of tickets for the June 18 performance of Calgary's Workshop 14 production of *Auntie Mame.* They had seen René Iles in that production.

the remaining cast members who were at all experienced were not happy.

A cursory glance at the casts of these plays is enough to show that many actors were moving between Circle Eight and Theatre Associates, which showed either that these actors were desperately needed for specific rôles, or that the complement of good available actors in the city was very small. It became apparent that the two groups had to co-operate, or one of them had to fold.

A small notice in the *Edmonton Journal* had appeared on September 16, 1960, prior to the productions of *My Sister Eileen* and *Auntie Mame*. The notice stated that, starting on September 23, Theatre Associates, "in its second year and operating as a club will present three-act plays, verse readings and premières of new plays at the Yardbird Suite in the Alberta Hall opposite the Macdonald Hotel." Three members were to direct these plays: Izzy Gliener, Bud D'Amur, and Alan Frost. Marjorie Knowler was to direct *Dial M For Murder*, and "the artistic director for the entire series is Jack McCreath." These ventures were to go on through that winter. Club membership gave admission to all these events for the price of two dollars for the season. However, in addition to these Theatre Associates activities in the Yardbird Suite, Jack McCreath intended to mount one play each year in the Jubilee Auditorium.

Circle Eight was bound to respond to these plans. It so happened that, in 1958, John Hirsch and Tom Hendry had established the first regional professional theatre in Canada – the Manitoba Theatre Centre in Winnipeg. Many interested theatre people across the country looked to MTC as a possible model for their own aspirations. In

Edmonton, the Circle Eight board proposed a meeting to discuss the possibility and viability of such a theatre centre in this city. A public meeting was announced (EJ.Dec.2, 1960) for Sunday, December 4, 1960, at 8:00 p.m. This was to be followed up by a question period on Monday night at a meeting with business people "when definite plans to establish the centre will be drafted." The meeting had been organized by "a group of theatre people, mainly drawn from Circle Eight." The speaker was to be John Hirsch, then Artistic Director of the Manitoba Theatre Centre.

So, on December 4, 1960, thirty-five theatre people gathered at the Garneau Cinema to hear John Hirsch discuss the possibility of a Theatre Centre "to save the North", to be located in Edmonton. Three of the people on the committee were Audrey Grisdale, President of Circle Eight; Jack McCreath, Supervisor of Drama for the Province of Alberta; and Gordon Peacock, Professor of Drama, University of Alberta. The Chairman was E.M. Blanchard, who was not a theatre person, and was very involved with Edmonton's United Community Fund.[60]

Evidently Dr. Johns, by this time President of the University, was extremely interested in the project, and he received a letter from Gordon Peacock dated March 1,

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[60] Those who were at the meeting, including the writer, remember being quite impressed with Hirsch's prepared speech, but less than enthusiastic about his answers to questions. He did not address the subject matter, namely the creation of a Theatre Centre in Edmonton. He brushed it off as a simple thing to do, as it had been done in Winnipeg. But he failed to mention that much of the funding for the Manitoba Theatre Centre had been provided by Mrs. Richardson, of the Richardson Grain Companies and Richardson Securities. He was also unable to answer a number of specific questions from artists and/or business people.

1961 saying that because Peacock's responsibility was the need of facilities for Studio Theatre, he could be on the Theatre Centre planning committee only in an advisory capacity. Peacock also advised caution in this, because Vancouver had had seven unsuccessful attempts at creating a professional company since the end of World War II. In addition, Peacock mentioned that the theatre centre project did not at that time have the support of the local drama groups, the Children's Theatre, or the Department of Cultural Activities(UAA 92.22 Drama Dept.Box 1). Perhaps because of this lack of support, nothing more was done about this project in the wider Edmonton theatrical community. A year after the meeting, on December 6, 1961, Gordon Peacock wrote to Dr. Johns, saying that developments had been "less than satisfactory," that little progress had been made, and that it appeared that the project "is expiring through inertia." Dr. Johns wrote back on December 8, 1961, saying how sorry he was at the news. There must have been some talk of buying the Garneau Theatre for use by Studio Theatre, among others, since Johns also mentioned in his letter that the Board of Governors had definitely decided not to proceed with plans for purchasing the Garneau Theatre Building. He also asked if Peacock would inform Mr. Blanchard , the chairman, of the possibility that the Garneau might be rented as a community playhouse "in another couple of years." If so, he suggested that "maybe the committee could be reconvened" (UAA 92.22 Drama Dept. Box 1).

The possibility of this proposed Theatre Centre must have travelled far and wide, in spite of the lack of interest on the part of local groups. A letter dated January 15,

1962, arrived for Gordon Peacock from a Mr. Bryan Griffith Dobbs – a Canadian in England (UAA 92.22 Drama Dept. Box 1). He had heard of the possibility of starting a theatre centre in Edmonton, and had written to Audrey Grisdale. He had had no reply, although John Hirsch had told him that Grisdale had received his letter. Dobbs had also discussed the matter with Donald Pimm. In his letter to Peacock, Dobbs lists his experience with the Arts Council of Great Britain, and his work as an assistant director with the Royal Shakespeare Company at Stratford, England. He also gives suggestions for Edmonton "where the rival groups appear to be vying for the prestige of being the nucleus around which a professional theatre centre can be set up" (UAA 92.22 Drama Dept.Box 1). Dobbs appears to have had no reply from Gordon Peacock. And, as can be seen from the names of the original committee members, the "rival groups" may have been wary of each other, but were not at loggerheads; they were certainly on speaking terms.

Later that same December (EJ Dec 17, 1960), Desmond Bill interviewed Jack McCreath, Gordon Peacock, and Audrey Grisdale (CEA RG 21.S22) McCreath said that he disagreed with John Hirsch that Edmonton was ready for professional theatre. He thought there should be no thought of a professional theatre until "there exists an audience of regular theatregoers amounting to three per cent of our population" but suggested "that the Theatre Associates experiment. . . could be the basis for 'the start of the dream'." He also extended an invitation to Circle Eight since they "would now seem to be looking in the same direction" which must have been extremely galling to

them, as Circle Eight had extended the invitation to Hirsch in the first place. Peacock cautioned that "all those taking the lead in adult and children's theatre must be willing to submerge their personalities in the one organization." He also pointed out that it would need "the same kind of support given to the local football team" but that the "university drama division and its Studio Theatre would enthusiastically support such a project." Audrey Grisdale felt very positive about John Hirsch's visit and was certain that the centre would go ahead.

Meanwhile, Theatre Associates and Circle Eight had continued to do productions in tandem into 1961. On April 29, 1961, the *Edmonton Journal* had a long preview of the next Theatre Associates' play, *The Boy Friend* by Sandy Wilson, to be directed by Jack McCreath for a four-night run on the Jubilee Auditorium main stage. The music was to be directed by the man who had arranged the songs and conducted the orchestra for the *Saturday Night Show* of the Jubilee Auditorium opening: Dave Peterkin (and his Bearcats). This expressed part of McCreath's intention to mount a large-scale production each year at the Jubilee, as well as several smaller productions in smaller spaces.

Joe Shoctor directed *A Streetcar Named Desire* by Tennessee Williams at the Victoria Composite auditorium from May 23 – 27, 1961. This would prove to be the final production of Circle Eight. In the play were Mickey Macdonald, Jim Hand, Wally McSween, and Elaine Polovnikoff. In spite of a rave review by John Bilsland (TT June 1961), in which he said that although he disliked the play, he found a major interest in the

performances to be the "subtle link" developed between the two sisters "in so blatantly violent a play," Circle Eight ceased to exist. *Auntie Mame* had effectively sounded the death knell for the company. There had been so much infighting, actors dropping out, sibling rivalry, and general unhappiness in the cast during rehearsals that it was amazing that the play had ever made it on to the stage in the first place.

At the same time, Theatre Associates was continuing productions, again in a small space – the Social Room at the Jubilee Auditorium on June 16 – 17, 1961. The play was *Ten Little Indians* by Agatha Christie, directed by Robert Hedley. In addition to Georgie Collins, Jack Wilson, Frank Glenfield, Ivor Roberts, Bob Mumford, and Mary Glenfield, the cast included three students from the Department of Drama at the University of Alberta — Gary Mitchell,[61] Karen Austin, and Ken Welsh.[62]

By this time, Theatre Associates had found a new home, a permanent building for the company: this had been the last active one-room schoolhouse, to be rented from the City of Edmonton for about ten dollars a month. It needed a great deal of cleaning and renovation, as squatters had been living in it for many years. It was the first time that a local theatre group had moved into premises which the group could use for meetings, rehearsals, and performances – a space which they could call their own. Located at the south end of the Fifth Street Bridge[63] on the Walterdale Flats, it would give the company

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[61]Who later joined New York's Neighborhood Playhouse.

[62]Both of whom went on for further training to the National Theatre School in Montreal.

[63]Now called Walterdale Bridge.

a focus and a meeting-place. While the city was discussing building a civic centre (possibly to include a theatre) (EJ Jun 10, 1961), the members of Theatre Associates were already making the schoolhouse into a usable space. In fact, the cast of *Ten Little Indians* rehearsed in the still– unfinished building, which had been stripped down to a virtual shell, and was in the process of being refurbished. The building was filthy – a legacy of the squatters, so it was decided to paint the interior walls black to hide the chips and cracks. Daisy Wilson remembers scrubbing the disgusting toilet on her hands and knees for hours to make it even presentable. The space immediately behind the stage was set aside for a unisex dressing room, with a thin wall dividing it from the stage itself.[64] An article in the *Edmonton Journal* of September 9, 1961, contained the final paragraph: "Unlike last year, when Theatre Associates staged two successful shows at the Jubilee Auditorium, *The Boy Friend* and *My Sister Eileen*, no big shows are being planned for this season. Members have decided to concentrate all their efforts on the new theatre."

This decision represented a radical departure from the thinking of previous theatre groups. Jack McCreath had said that there was a pressing need for a theatre group to have its own home, which was a reiteration of what Eva Howard had said, many years before, in 1945. The efforts of the company were to be directed to the building up of an

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So thin, in fact, that the actors hardly dared to breathe, let alone cough. In the dressing-room during the run of The Cocktail Party, when Don Biamonte, who had a fund of jokes, was whispering them to the present writer and Renée Laird, both of them had to stuff fabric into their mouths so that the action on stage wouldn't be interrupted, and also so they could hear their cues.

audience, rather than the filling of a large house. The work of Theatre Associates had essentially entered a new phase, when the company took the radical step of acquiring access to an intimate venue to serve as a meeting-place and performing space for its own work, and not simply a rented auditorium. In spite of the small size of the building, there were, at the beginning, some nights when the cast onstage outnumbered the audience in the seats. During this time, all Theatre Associates members, in addition to working at their various daytime jobs, as well as acting and helping with other productions in the city such as Theatre for Children, were also hard at work during any time they could spare on the building on Walterdale Flats. Gerd Weih, a doctor in Edmonton, built the foyer for the new theatre almost single-handed. The first seats for the tiny theatre were actually wooden kitchen chairs, covered with a slipover back and tie-on seat made from a violet-coloured fabric bought by Julie Wiles on the cheap, and sewn at home by various members. In the same way that the Wiles's Cottage Players had merged with the Court Players, so the latter were now part of Theatre Associates. This made for a broad, stable base for the group, with the various links joining to make an interwoven whole.

On November 25, 1961, the doors opened on the first-ever production at Walterdale Playhouse, so–called because of its location on Walterdale Flats. The play was *Epitaph for George Dillon* by John Osborne, directed by Marjorie Knowler. In the cast were Doreen Ibsen, Daniel Walsh, Rita Bennett, Patricia Riley, and Elsa Houba. The theatre was opened by Mrs. Mary Mooney,[65] who said that it was probably the

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[65]Representing her father, the Honourable J.J. Bowlen, Lieutenant-Governor of Alberta.

smallest theatre in North America, seating between seventy and ninety people, depending on the play. "Anyone in the front row of seats could lean over and touch an actor," but "It did not seem to faze any of [the performers] in the least."(EJ,Nov.27,1961) In fact, in one play, Don Biamonte, groping his way offstage in the dark at the end of an act, lost his balance and sat on the knee of a female patron; when the lights went up, he got up. "Oh, dear," she said disappointedly, "I thought I'd got you!"

From January 17 – 20, 1962, a reading of *Don Juan in Hell* (Act III from Bernard Shaw's *Man and Superman*) was given at Walterdale Playhouse, with Jack McCreath, Walter Kaasa, Marjorie Knowler and Doreen Ibsen.[66] Following close on its heels came Walterdale's second full-length play, Peter Ustinov's *Romanoff and Juliet*, which ran from January 24 to February 3, and was directed by Frank Glenfield with Jack Wilson, Hutch Shandro, Ellawynne Rivet, Karen Austin, Larry Trahan, Mary Glenfield, and Vic Sutton as the main actors in a large cast. It now seems self-evident that Jack McCreath was right when he said that the real need of any theatre group was a home of its own. This was something which had not been vigorously pursued by groups previously. The tiny theatre began to have some sort of *cachet* among the playgoing public, and it became "the thing" for audiences to go down to the little Playhouse and sit cheek by jowl with each other. Even today, there are people in Edmonton who have been going regularly to Walterdale plays since those early days. The neighbouring residents of the small houses

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[66] This production had already been on tour in Alberta the previous November, with Olga Roland in place of Doreen Ibsen.

on the Flats began to accept, and be proud of, "their" theatre, and the performers got used to, and enjoyed, seeing some of the neighbours wandering in from time to time to watch rehearsals. In many ways, this was the beginning of the ideal set-up towards which many of us had been striving, albeit unconsciously. There was a feeling of community among the theatre people at Walterdale, and this spread to the public at large. We felt that we were involved in the creation of something greater than ourselves.

Money was still being raised for the necessary alterations to the Playhouse; one of these ventures was the sale of "bricks". These were not actual bricks, but brick wallpaper-type MacTac, which was stuck on a large sheet of plywood, with the name of a donor on each "brick". Julie Wiles was a friend of Tania Moiseiwitsch, the great English designer, and she and Tyrone Guthrie, both of whom were founding artists at the Stratford Shakespearean Festival, contributed bricks.

For the 1962-1963 season, Theatre Associates announced five plays: *Barranca*, to be written and directed by Jack McCreath; a musical of *Jack and the Beanstalk*; *The Cave Dwellers* by William Saroyan, to be directed by Frank Glenfield; a remount of *Lady Audley's Secret* by Brian J. Burton to be directed by Macdonald Knowler; and *The Cocktail Party* by T.S. Eliot, to be directed by Marjorie Knowler. This was a full season indeed. Surprisingly, other groups occasionally wanted to use the small theatre. In spite of the somewhat cranped quarters, they probably enjoyed the intimacy with the audience. In February 1962, the David Peterkin Chorale performed for two nights at the Playhouse. Also, the young actors from Theatre for Children and The Playground

Players were growing up and beginning to act at Walterdale. For instance, Judy Unwin (now Tilley), who was one of the most regular performers for children, played the part of Jo in *A Taste of Honey* by Shelagh Delaney, the very young English playwright, directed by Mac Knowler at the Playhouse. In March 1963, she was in the melodrama *Tempted, Tried and True*, by Bill Johnson, with Wally McSween and Barbara Reese, also directed by Mac Knowler. John Bilsland gave it a rave review: "I have nothing but the highest praise for it. . . If I had the space I should like to praise all the members of Mr. Knowler's cast for their quite delightful performances"(EJ Mar 4 1963). By now, it had become almost automatically accepted that, although someone might owe his or her first loyalty to Theatre Associates, it did not prevent him or her in any way from accepting a part with another group.

The first play written and also directed specifically for Walterdale Playhouse was *Barranca* by Jack McCreath. The cast included Doreen Ibsen, Gunnhild Clegg, and Robbie Newton. This play evoked diametrically opposed responses from two reviewers. A review in *Town Talk* by John Bilsland panned the play, saying that although he takes "no joy in damning *Barranca* . . . the play was so poor . . . I could feel some very fine performers being dragged down" (TT Dec. 1962). On the other hand, John Keeping wrote in the *Edmonton Journal* that McCreath "must be congratulated for the excellent play . . . [which] should provide much enjoyment for everyone during its stay . . ." (EJ,Nov.3,1962). Alderman Ron Hayter wrote a letter to the *Edmonton Journal*, in which he said: "While it had some flaws in dialogue and staging, the play was excellent

for a premiere. . . There is a bright future for theatre in Edmonton so long as we have brilliant and dedicated thespians such as Jack McCreath and the Theatre Associates in our midst" (EJ,Nov 15, 1962).

By the early 1960s, there was a strongly felt need for a permanent, professional theatre company in the city. Long before this, Elizabeth Sterling Haynes had said: "Someday perhaps we will build our own theatre . . ." And, in A Brief Submitted by the Edmonton Allied Arts Council to the City of Edmonton, dated September 15, 1962, it seemed that this idea was to become a reality. Even though John Bilsland had argued that Edmonton was not ready for a professional theatre (TT Jan. 1962), the Webb and Knapp blueprints for a civic centre (CEA 6.P 374, Feb. 1962) included a theatre space, and the Allied Arts brief to the city said: "We therefore submit that no time should be lost in arranging a completion date for 1967 of at least a portion of the proposed civic centre to contain an intimate theatre . . ." (CEA RG11 Class 11 File 1). It was necessary to stress this, because a year earlier the *Edmonton Journal* had reported the approval of the city council "in principle" for the development of a $3,000,000 civic centre project with no mention of a theatre (EJ Apr 11, 1961).

Desmond Bill had already written about the inadequacies of Walterdale Playhouse – its very restrictive small size, limiting the plays which could be produced there. However "the Playhouse does provide a hint of what is needed in Edmonton. Certainly Theatre Associates are the only people consciously trying to fill the need." He ended by writing: "Unless the theatre can be made exciting and appealing it will never attract the

audience that it needs in order to develop"(CEA RG 21 S.22 EJ Jun 9, 1962). The publication of the Allied Arts brief inspired a flurry of articles by Desmond Bill in his column "On the Arts" in the *Edmonton Journal*. The Allied Arts Council had called a meeting for Wednesday, June 3, 1962 to plan a campaign to restore the plan for a theatre in the civic centre. The city council, on the other hand, thought it much more important to build a new Legion building, as Alberta College needed to expand to the present Montgomery Legion site. Bill wrote that: "Not one voice objected to the omission" and spoke of ". . . apathy [on the part of the Allied Arts Council]. If the Legion gets a spanking new cocktail bar and they do not get their theatre, it will be their own fault"(CEA RG21 Bk22 EJ Jun 30 1962). On July 7 Desmond Bill wrote about the Allied Arts meeting, saying that he was sorry for the "old timers who for years have kept alive such organizations . . . It was Joe Shoctor who cut across a lot of tangled thinking" and "Dick Morton lashed out at city council for its 'red herring' that the city could not operate a theatre" (CEA 21. S22 EJ Jul 7, 1962). It was agreed to set up a committee to plan the campaign for a theatre; the people on the committee would be Joe Shoctor, Jack McCreath, Dick Morton and Hugh Currie. Bill writes that "the new people have stirred more interest in the E.A.A.C. in the past month than former councils succeeded in doing in years."

The visit of John Hirsch of the Manitoba Theatre Centre in 1960, and the plans in 1962 for a civic centre, to include a theatre, in the heart of downtown Edmonton, obviously took root and grew in at least a part of the theatrical community. The idea of

a regional, professional theatre, formulated in 1961 by Circle Eight and the Blanchard committee, never went away, and on January 10, 1964, an article in the *Edmonton Journal* announced the formation of a new company, to be called the Edmonton Repertory Company, spearheaded by David Galbraith. Galbraith, from all accounts, appears to have been an impresario – an organizer of public entertainment – rather than a theatre producer. He was also a singer who had appeared both as a soloist in the city, and in various musicals. According to Jennie Diment, then make-up head at CBC, Galbraith came with his wife from the West Coast, appeared several times as a singer on The Buddy Victor television show here, was in several musicals, then went back to Vancouver. While in Edmonton, he had apparently gathered together enough people to form the Edmonton Repertory Company. All this occurred just one year before the opening of the Citadel Theatre in November 1965. The six plays during the first season of the Repertory Company were to be presented under the overall title of Stage 64 at the Strand Theatre on Jasper Avenue. The Community Theatre, and later Court Players, had found the Victoria Composite High School auditorium impossible to fill with any consistency, and the Strand was much larger and more costly. Theatre Associates had already shown that there was a loyal, regular audience for a smaller space, although Walterdale Playhouse was too small to be a long-term venue. The Stage 64 season began in January 1964 with *My Three Angels* by Sam and Bella Spewak; Wally McSween, Jim Worthington, and John Arntzen had been chosen to appear in the leading roles, with Elsa Houba, Shirley Bedry, and Richard Savill also in the production. Four

of these six actors were seen regularly in Theatre Associates' plays. John Orrell's review was not a good one. He wrote that the translation of the play was poor, and that the production "was hardly the 'professional' theatre we had looked for" (TT Mar 1964). The other plays chosen for the company's first season were *Night of January 16* by Ayn Rand; *Tea and Sympathy* by Robert Anderson, featuring sisters Mickey Macdonald and Vernis Christie; *The Little Hut* by André Roussin; *Separate Tables* by Terence Rattigan; and *Bell, Book and Candle* by John Van Druten. David Galbraith was quoted as saying: "All the top theatre people in Edmonton are now associated with the company . . . we hope to expose a lot of drama students from the university and the high schools to good theatre" (EJ Jan 10, 1964).

Only the first two plays originally announced were ever produced by the new company, and by March 13, 1964, the *Edmonton Journal* was reporting that the fledgling group, and more specifically David Galbraith himself, had lost money on both plays, and that there was dissension in the organization. This was denied by Mickey Macdonald as well as by Wally McSween, President of the recently formed executive. Mickey was quoted as saying: "Rumours, rumours, rumours. Pure hogwash." Wally said that he didn't know ". . . whether David Galbraith will be on the executive or not. . . As for cast dissension, I never saw any." (EJ Mar 13, 1964) After this, no more was heard of this group.

For Theatre Associates also, 1964 had begun with a problem. The group was only renting the old one-room schoolhouse from the city, and the Kinsmen had an option

on the land to build a sports complex. So the Walterdale Playhouse was no longer secure, and other premises had to be sought. Meanwhile, Theatre Associates was getting on with its regular season, in spite of Galbraith's statement to the effect that "all the top theatre people in Edmonton" were associated with Stage 64. In fact, the present writer remembers nothing of the Edmonton Repertory Company, as she was too involved at the time with rehearsals for Ibsen's *Hedda Gabler*. This Ibsen play was in keeping with the Theatre Associates tradition of doing at least one classical play each season which could be said to be a challenge for the audience, in addition to one play which was fun, comedic, and bubbly! *Hedda Gabler* was directed by Frank Glenfield, with Marjorie Knowler designing set and costumes, and also acting in the production as Mrs. Elvsted. Others in the play were Jack Wilson (Judge Brack), Maurice Brand (Eilert Loevborg), Gilly Brand (Aunt Julie), Mary Glenfield (Hedda Gabler), Hutch Shandro[67] (Tesman), and Betty Richardson (Berta). The play had a rave review from John Orrell in the May 1964 issue of *Town Talk*, and a poor review from Barry Westgate in the *Journal* (EJ.Apr.3,1964).[68]

Soon after *Hedda*, Mac Knowler had to give up his position as President of Theatre Associates because of ill health. The Treasurer, Charles Anderson, took over as

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67 Who had just arrived back from his training at the London Academy of Music and Dramatic Art in London, England.

68 Westgate did not want to be the theatre reviewer, and so tried his best to get out of the job without actually resigning, so that he could be transferred back to the sports page, from whence he had come! He later came to enjoy being the theatre reviewer.

President. In October, virtually at the beginning of the 1964-1965 season, Mac Knowler collapsed with a heart attack and died. In memory of her husband, Marjorie directed a performance of poetry and folksongs, read by three of his friends, Jack McCreath, Mary Glenfield, and Maurice Brand. John Bilsland[69] chose the poems, Vern Ray the songs, and the performances ran from December 2 –12, 1964.

By this time, it was imperative for Theatre Associates to find another home, with the Kinsmen about to demolish its current one in order to build a sports complex. Isadore Gliener was a member of the Kinsmen board, and he had been very keen for the new complex to contain a theatre space. In the initial stages of the Kinsmen project, Theatre Associates was told that the new Kinsmen Fieldhouse would contain a theatre space. With this in mind, individual theatre people assisted for about three years in staffing the Kinsmen booth for car raffles at the Edmonton Exhibition.[70] When it became apparent that this proposed theatre was not going to materialise, a committee of two, Ron Wigmore and Frank Glenfield, was formed to search for another possible theatre space. They looked at old abandoned churches and warehouses – whatever the realtor found for them. Meanwhile, Bill Hosty of the Salvation Army told Wigmore that the Army was going to move out of its downtown Citadel. Then the realtor told Wigmore and Glenfield that the Citadel was indeed up for sale for ninety thousand dollars. He also said that a lawyer in town was after it as well. The lawyer, of course, was Joe Shoctor,

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[69]From the University of Alberta Department of English.

[70]Izzy Gliener was an earlier *protégé* of Elizabeth Sterling Haynes.

who had been involved with Edmonton theatre during school and university. He had been directed in plays by both Eva Howard and Elizabeth Sterling Haynes, and had directed many plays himself. Bud D'Amur was also interested in the property for his Yardbird productions. However, the interim Theatre Associates President, Charles Anderson, felt that theatre people were pretty well unable to handle business dealings, so he would not allow Glenfield and Wigmore to pursue the Citadel possibility, or even to bring it to the Board meeting. He also felt, erroneously, that theatre people were always on the move, so would be unable to pay off any indebtedness. As a result, Joe Shoctor got the Citadel and developed it into the first professional theatre in Alberta, and the largest such organization in Edmonton. Shoctor invited Wigmore and Glenfield to see it during the reconstruction, and he also invited them, and their families, to the opening of the new Theatre. So, even here, we can see something of a *rapport* and a blurring of lines, this time between the new professional and the amateur/community theatres. And we must remember that Shoctor had been very involved with the Little/Community theatres and with Circle Eight. He knew the local scene and the local people, and indeed had worked with many of them, both as an actor and as a director. So this was very different from a new broom that sweeps clean; probably Joe Shoctor could not have forgotten his roots, even if he wanted to. In addition, Theatre Associates had already compiled a list of several hundred active theatre supporters which they made available to the Citadel, complete with names and addresses, for the professional group to use for its initial mailing list. In the early years of the Citadel, the majority of people on this list

attended both Walterdale and the new professional theatre.

At the beginning of the 1964-1965 season, Bud D'Amur, one of the founders of Theatre Associates, took over the Yardbird Suite premises in order to present local music and theatre programming.(EJ.Oct.9,1964). In December, he directed Wilfred Watson's play, *Wail for Two Pedestals*, with Wilf Rowe, Carol Frederickson, Carol Saw, and Danny Walsh. In January 1965, Danny Walsh directed *Krapp's Last Tape* by Samuel Beckett, and *The Bald Soprano* by Eugène Ionesco. Plays such as Harold Pinter's *The Dumb Waiter*, directed by Robert Mumford, with Allen Hughes and Wally McSween, alternated with poetry readings and musical evenings. On March 19-20, 1965, Henry Kreisel[71] read T.S. Eliot with Chris Johnson, a classical guitarist; and in April, the poetry of Yeats was read by Jim Salt, Jo Everett and Danny Walsh. It is not difficult to see that the same names are occurring, as in the plays at Walterdale Playhouse. From March 25-27, 1965, Jack McCreath presented "Lost Songs from the Broadway Stage", with Kathryn Forrest (Buchanan) and Norma Chapman at the Yardbird.

Some of the most interesting developments at the Yardbird Suite were the plays which were written specifically for Bud D'Amur and the Yardbird space by Wilfred Watson.[72] In addition to *Wail for Two Pedestals*, which was also invited to the

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A professor in the Department of English, University of Alberta, and author of *The Rich Man* and *The Betrayal.*

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Poet, playwright and professor in the Department of English, University of Alberta. He had also written plays for the Studio Theatre, which are discussed under the university heading.

Musicians' and Actors' Club in Calgary, and reviewed there by Jamie Portman as "a provocative and constantly entertaining evening"(CH. Jan.23,1965), D'Amur also directed Watson's revue, *Chez Vous Comfortable Pew*, "a hilarious adventure in theatre" (EJ May 13,1965); and *Tom Jones Meets Fanny Hill: A Comment on the Local Constabulary* in October 1965. More actors were dividing their time between Walterdale Playhouse and the Yardbird Suite, including Eric Candy, Maurice and Gilly Brand, Dennis Kalman, Gayle Roberts,[73] Susan Smith, and Robbie Newton. Actors who were also doing so included several who were more usually seen on the stage of Studio Theatre, such as Ted Kemp, Margaret Kopala, Jon Whyte, and Robert Mumford.

While the Yardbird Suite produced some fascinating evenings of theatre, the actual theatre space was even more confining than Walterdale, both for actors and audience. In the meantime, Theatre Associates continued with its regular programming. In April 1965, John Orrell reviewed Gilly Brand as "brilliant" in Beckett's *Happy Days* at Walterdale Playhouse (TT.Apr.1965). The final play of the 1965-1966 season at the original Playhouse was *Rashomon*, translated by Garson Kanin from the film by the great Japanese film director, Akira Kurosawa, which was in turn an adaptation of the novel by Akutagawa Ryūnosuke. The play was directed by Frank Glenfield, and the very beautiful set was designed by James Stolee, who was to design many more sets over the years for Theatre Associates. In the cast were Elsa Houba, Don Biamonte, Eric Candy,

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[73]Better known by her professional stage name, Alison Wells.

Larry Trahan, Dennis Kalman, and Tom Bentley-Fisher.[74] Theatre Associates was still putting on regular seasons of plays, without any idea as to where they would be moving once the Kinsmen Fieldhouse building was under way. Not only was this the final play of the regular season, it was also, sadly, the last production at the little theatre on Walterdale Flats.

From July 17 – 29 1964, a Walterdale melodrama was put on during Klondike Days for the first time. *Tempted, Tried and True* had been directed by Mac Knowler at the Playhouse from March 1–9, 1963; the set, in such a small space, was a triumph of ingenuity. Now the play was being shown at the Strand Theatre as part of Klondike Days celebrations, with the same cast as the earlier production: Wally McSween, Judy Unwin, and Barbara Reese. It was directed by Ron Wigmore. And the audiences came. Unlike the experience of the Edmonton Repertory Company at the Strand Theatre, a melodrama was obviously something which appealed to people during Klondike Days. It was the beginning of an annual tradition for Theatre Associates; the present writer remembers giving out leaflets by the dozen at the Sunday Promenade, which used to take place during Klondike Days, along with street corner dancers and entertainers on temporary platforms along Jasper Avenue. The Walterdale melodramas were produced for many years, first at the Strand, then at the Citadel. After returning to Walterdale Playhouse for several years, they were finally discontinued in the 1998-1999 season.

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Who was then still a student at Victoria Composite High School, and who later became the Artistic Director of Saskatoon's 25th Street Theatre.

Meanwhile, the Citadel Theatre opened for its first season with a production of Edward Albee's *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* directed by Bernie Engel, from November 10-27, 1965. He also played the lead opposite his wife, Betty Oliver. Engel had arrived in Edmonton in September, 1965, as a professor in the Department of Drama at the University of Alberta Marjorie Knowler, who had been a force in both the Court Players, then Walterdale, had also begun working for the Citadel as assistant to the artistic director, John Hurlburt

Over the summer of 1966, a new home was found for Theatre Associates at the building owned by the Legion of Frontiersmen on 109 Street and Kingsway Avenue. Colonel Cormack, of the University of Alberta Department of Extension, was also the Colonel in Chief[75] of the Legion of Frontiersmen. He was very supportive of Theatre Associates, and was instrumental in getting the Frontiersmen's building for the next Walterdale Theatre. As with the previous theatre building, the group did not own the land, but paid one dollar a year to the city for rent of the land. By this time, Frank Glenfield was president of Theatre Associates. The first production in the new location, from October 26 to November 5, 1966, was *A Thousand Clowns* by Herbert Gardner, directed by Bob Vanderleelie. At Walterdale, there had been much worrying as to whether the audience would move with them to Kingsway, but the audience found its way over to the new premises by car and by bus. The following year, in 1967, the building was bought from the Frontiersmen for eleven thousand dollars, but the land was

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[75]An honorary title.

still owned by the city. The only thing missing was the neighbours, who had dropped in from time to time on Walterdale Flats. In the new location, there were no neighbours, but the theatre still had the same feeling of community. Once again the actors, directors, technicians, artists and backstage helpers worked together to make the unpromising building into a real theatre. The seating had increased from seventy to a hundred, there were toilets for the audience,[76] and the ugly building was transformed into a warm and workable theatrical space. The theatre retained the name Walterdale Playhouse, and a motion was made by the present writer at an Annual General Meeting in 1967 to call the actual group Walterdale (instead of Edmonton) Theatre Associates. Because of its first building on Walterdale Flats, the name had changed by default; people were already calling it Walterdale Theatre Associates. But the name was not officially changed until March 17, 1970.

At the beginning of the 1970s, Theatre Associates' home was again under threat, and the group had to move again. The City which still owned the land on which the second Walterdale Playhouse now stood, had sold the land to Sears and the developers of Kingsway Garden Mall. However, the City administration apparently felt badly about selling land out from under the theatre group once again, so they found a home for Walterdale in a former firehall on 83 Avenue between 103 and 104 Streets. This building had originally been Strathcona Firehall No.1, built in 1909, and after the

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[76] With the names Romeo and Juliet painted on them, as they still are in the present building.

amalgamation of the cities Edmonton and Strathcona in 1912, it became Edmonton Firehall No. 6.[77] It is the oldest firehall still in existence in either Edmonton or Calgary. This time the building required a massive amount of renovation in order to make it usable as a theatre. An architect, Dan MacPherson[78], was called in and the group of willing workers began all over again to transform a building into a theatrical space. Ron Wigmore has never forgotten his allotted task: to clean the accumulated layers of pigeon droppings out of the tower. The new theatre began its theatrical existence in 1974 with a production of Joe Orton's *What The Butler Saw*, directed by Marjorie Knowler. In the cast were Vivien Bosley, Joan Milroy, Ron Wigmore, Warren Graves, and Maurice Brand. Walterdale Theatre Associates is still firmly established on this site on 83 Avenue, and has a long-term lease from the city.

Of course, there were other groups in Edmonton over a number of years which had come together for various reasons, including church affiliation – some for a short time, others for longer. The Catholic Drama League of Edmonton, along with the Catholic Youth Organization, sponsored a number of drama festivals at the various halls in the city. On Thursday, May 13, 1943, the festival was held at the Separate School Auditorium, with six groups entered. One of these was the Cathedral C.Y.O. in *The*

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[77] The next Firehall No. 6, located across 83 Avenue from Walterdale, was in turn transformed into a theatre when Chinook Theatre acquired the use of the building from the city in 1983. It is now called the New Varscona. As has often happened, in the spirit of cooperation in Edmonton theatre, Walterdale loaned Chinook lights, curtains, tables and chairs, and stage props for their first productions.

[78] Who donated his time and services.

Language of Love by Edward Percy, which was directed by Jack Wilson. On April 23-25, 1947, the Annual Drama Festival for the Archbishop MacDonald Trophy was held at the Masonic Temple; two of the plays were *The Happy Journey* by Thornton Wilder, directed by Jack Wilson, and *The Nursery Maid of Heaven* by Thomas Wood Stevens, directed by William R. Wallace. The adjudicator for the festival on April 29 and 30, 1948 was Elsie Park Gowan; the entry from the Cathedral Players, *The Proposal* by Anton Tchekhoff (as in the program), directed by Jack Wilson, won the Trophy, and the lead in the play, John Lafortune, won the best actor award. He was later to act at Studio Theatre a number of times. For the 1950 festival, on April 26-28, the two adjudicators were Jack Wilson and Laurier Picard, and on May 11 and 12, 1951, Wilson was back directing again for the Edmonton Catholic Drama Guild; the play was *Here Comes Charlie* by Jay Tobias.

On September 16, 1956 the Archdiocese of Edmonton and The Cathedral Players put on a Golden Jubilee program for the Most Reverend John Hugh MacDonald's fiftieth anniversary of his ordination as a priest. This took the form of a pageant; John Patrick Gillese wrote the script of *The Servant's Story* which was narrated by Jack Wilson and directed by John Rivet. The Golden Jubilee Pageant was attended by 6,000 people at the Edmonton Gardens.

All Saints Cathedral Guild sponsored three plays; the first at the Cathedral, the second at the Jubilee Auditorium, the third at Victoria Composite High School. These were *Murder in the Cathedral* by T.S. Eliot in November 1964; *A Man For All Seasons*

by Robert Bolt, from January 19-20 and March 25-26, 1966; and *Hadrian VII* by Peter Luke, from the book by Frederick Rolfe, in January, 1972. These All Saints plays were directed by Jack McCreath, and had Walter Kaasa in the leading role.

Other groups did spring up between the late sixties and early seventies. The Chancel Players, directed by Ivor Roberts, and under the auspices of the Christian Drama Council, produced two plays for conferences at Banff and at Holy Redeemer College in Edmonton: *Destiny Destination*, and *The Polling Booth*.

Prestige Productions came along much later in 1971, also spearheaded by Jack McCreath. This was a cooperative, which began with melodramas at the Embers Night Club, and went on to full-scale productions in various locales, including the theatre in the University's Students' Union Building. Most of the original members were drawn from Walterdale.

Chapter Three. University Theatre

By the early 1930s, the University of Alberta Department of Extension had already been in existence for a number of years. It had been established in 1912, with A.E. Ottewell as the secretary in charge of its activities. This was just four years after the founding of the University itself and its first faculty, the Faculty of Arts, in 1908. The creation of a Department of Extension expressed "a direct relationship between the University and the people of the province . . . [this] was in line with a movement which was to become very important in the universities of the English-speaking world, the movement to 'bring the university to the people.'"[79] The Extension Library soon followed, to mail out books to far-flung Alberta communities.

By 1932, a Department of Fine Arts had been added to the Department of Extension, and Elizabeth Sterling Haynes had been appointed drama specialist for Extension. This was a direct consequence of the visit of Dr. Learned of the Carnegie Corporation of New York to the Department in March, and his recommendation that it apply for a $30,000.00 grant. On May 24, 1932, word came that the grant had been approved "for assistance in the development of a fine arts programme - music, painting and drama . . ."[80] The management and distribution of the fund was in the hands of Dr. E.A. Corbett. Mrs. Haynes had begun to travel many miles all over Alberta,

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[79] John Macdonald, The History of the University of Alberta 1908-1958 (University of Alberta, 1958), p.13.

[80] Day, E.S.H. . . . Alberta Theatre, p.63.

adjudicating, arranging lectures and courses, helping local actors and directors bring play productions to fruition, and encouraging theatre across the province. This was during the Depression, and ". . . as the physical resources and security of the material world failed . . . many people began to turn inwards to more spiritual resources."[81] Even before Elizabeth Sterling Haynes began her work for the Department of Extension, the women in the rural communities had taken over the cultural life of the family in rural Alberta, and Haynes drew on this ready-made circumstance in her work. Moira Day calls Haynes' work in Extension as being at the ". . . start of a revolutionary new movement in rural Alberta . . . "[82] She had already been involved with the Chautauqua movement[83] as an actress and director and the Department of Extension was asked for help and cooperation with this movement in the small towns of the province. Mrs. Haynes showed small-town drama groups how to put on competent and watchable productions, even with a lack of space or technical resources. Initially, it was probably the Chautauqua in Ryley on September 10, 1932, which showed her the way; it was an enormous success, proving that the small towns could present their own displays of music, art and drama. Over a five-year period, from 1932 to 1937, she visited about five hundred Alberta communities.

In addition to the Extension work, she was also a key figure in setting up summer

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[81]Ibid p. 74.

[82]Ibid p.82.

[83] This was a week-long family entertainment in a tent, consisting of music, lectures, drama and puppet shows. It began in Chautauqua Lake, N.Y. and had Canadian roots in Methodist temperance rallies.

schools of the drama in both Edmonton and Banff. The Summer School in Edmonton was initiated by, and in the hands of, the Carnegie grant committee at the university. It included courses in acting, voice production, stagecraft, and directing, which included educational drama. Moira Day says that it "was unsurpassed by any other Department of Education Summer School course in Western Canada."[84] It opened on the University of Alberta campus on July 3, 1933. By 1936, the enrolment had grown from 100 to 675. But, in the end, it was outstripped by the Banff School of Fine Arts, which was also spearheaded by Haynes, together with E. A. Corbett, Head of the Department of Extension.

The idea of another summer school, in addition to the one in Edmonton, was first suggested at a meeting of the Alberta Drama League in July, 1932. Southern Alberta delegates were opposed to the only summer drama school being based in Edmonton. Various place suggestions were bandied about and it was Dr. Corbett who first suggested Banff. By the end of the year, Corbett and Elizabeth Sterling Haynes had together drawn up a tentative plan for the centre at Banff. The University of Alberta President, Dr. Wallace, was extremely helpful with ideas for funding the school and with suggestions for sponsorship and accommodation. Haynes had spread the news of the probable school opening across the province, wherever she went. The Banff Summer School came into being in August, 1933, so that summer Mrs. Haynes had little or no respite between Edmonton and Banff. Added to this, she was increasingly dismayed to find that, over the

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[84]Day, E.S.H . . . Alberta Theatre, p.196

years, she was treated as unpaid help for much of the extra work which she was expected to do, as her only regular salary was from the Department of Extension. In Banff, her most loyal supporter and fellow-teacher was Ted Cohen, and together they arranged and taught most of the classes. She also had the help and support of Gwen Pharis who was her secretary, who was later to become a Canadian playwright, and better known by her married name, Gwen Pharis Ringwood.

Pharis was born in the United States in 1910, but came to Canada when she was three years old. After going to Crescent Heights High School in Calgary, she went for only one year to the University of Montana, because her father had sustained farming losses, and there was therefore no money to pay for her university education. Later, she went to the University of Alberta for two years, until she was again forced to leave for financial reasons. In 1933, she became secretary to Elizabeth Sterling Haynes in the Department of Extension, which took some of the burden off Haynes' shoulders, thanks to the Carnegie grant to the Department. "Five years of total immersion in drama with Elizabeth Haynes decided Gwen Pharis's future."[85] Her first play was directed by Mrs. Haynes at the Banff School of Fine Arts. It was at Banff that Pharis became influenced by Frederick Koch, Professor of Playwriting at the University of North Carolina. He was a passionate devotee of the folk play, and he saw in Gwen Pharis an exponent of this genre for Western Canada. He was instrumental in obtaining for her a Rockefeller grant to study with him, and to work with his Carolina Playmakers School, which he had

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[85]Geraldine Anthony, S.C., Gwen Pharis Ringwood (Twayne Publishers), 1981. p.25.

founded in 1919. So in 1937 she left to study for her M.A. in Drama at the University of North Carolina, coming back "in the summer of 1938 to teach at the University Summer School."[86]

In 1939, Gwen Pharis married Dr. Brian Ringwood, and was herself appointed director of drama for the Department of Extension at the University of Alberta. A year later, the Ringwoods moved to northern Saskatchewan in 1940, and it was in Goldfields, Saskatchewan, that Gwen Pharis Ringwood wrote one of her best-known plays — *The Courting of Marie Jenvrin.*[87] In 1942 the Ringwoods returned to Edmonton, and it was at this time that Gwen came to know Robert Gard.

Robert Gard was an American theatre professor from Cornell University, who had been appointed director of the Alberta Folklore and Local History Project. In 1944 he commissioned Gwen Ringwood to write four one-act plays, which were produced at the Banff School of Fine Arts. These were *The Jack and the Joker* (a play about Bob Edwards of the *Calgary Eye Opener*), *The Rainmaker* and *Stampede.* All three plays were produced at the Banff School of Fine Arts, and *Stampede* was directed by Sidney Risk in 1945 for the University Dramatic Society. Like Koch, Gard was passionately interested in folklore and grassroots theatre. He travelled all over Alberta, collecting material for his stories which he then put together in his own book, *Johnny Chinook*, published in 1944. He wrote these stories through "conversations" with a fictional

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[86]Ibid. p. 25.

[87]Her other great play is *Still Stands the House.*

"Johnny". These accounts of Alberta from the Rockies to Saskatchewan, and from the Northwest Territories to the United States border, he incorporated later into a long one-act play called *Johnny Dunn*. As written by Robert Gard, the play had a large and unwieldy cast, but the play was later refined by Robert Orchard when he headed the Drama Division at the University of Alberta. The play was not altered, but the lines and situations were made more theatrical and less academic, and the cast size was drastically reduced.

In 1940, Sidney Risk was appointed Supervisor of Extension Drama at the university, succeeding Ringwood. He was also a director of first the Edmonton Little Theatre, and then later the Edmonton Community Theatre. He had directed CKUA broadcasts and, later, presided over the first year of the Drama Division within the newly-created Department of Fine Arts. He was also the founding editor of *Stage Door*[88] in 1943. This publication contained articles on stagecraft, on acting, and on news of interest to groups across the province. He continued the work that had been started by Elizabeth Sterling Haynes. In 1945 he became the first head of the Drama Division, leaving late the following year to found Everyman Theatre Company in Vancouver. In the spring of 1946, he had initiated a group called the University Provincial Players. These were mainly students who were members of the University Dramatic Society. The

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[88] *Stage Door* began in April, 1943. It was issued by the Department of Extension under Sidney Risk, who also was editor. From 1947 it was edited by Elsie Park Gowan with Professor A.S.R Tweedie and R.H.G. Orchard on the editorial committee.(UAA 71.67, 72.7)

plays were all directed by Sidney Risk. In 1946 the plays were *Raisin' the Devil* by Robert Gard, *The Boor* by Anton Chekhov, and *To Meet the Chinooks* by Alan Fraser, winner of the 1945 competition of the Alberta Local History and Folklore Project.

In 1947 the University Provincial Players went on tour again, directed this time by Robert Orchard. The plays they presented were *Johnny Dunn* by Robert Gard, the medieval farce *Pierre Patelin*, and *The Happiest Man on Earth*, adapted by Albert Maltz.[89] In 1948 there was no tour because of floods in the province, and in 1949 the proposed tour was cancelled by the Alberta Drama Board because of the poor showing of the plays at the Alberta Drama League Festival in Calgary, adjudicated by Robert Speaight. The plays were to have included Elsie Park Gowan's *Breeches from Bond Street*; *Box and Cox*, a nineteenth-century farce by J. Maddison Morton; *Sordid Story* by J.A.S. Coppard and *The White Man and the Mountain* by Robert Orchard. The plays went to the Alberta Drama League Festival in Calgary on March 9, where Robert Orchard's play was praised by the adjudicator for its verse. In 1950, the tour was directed by Gordon Atkinson,[90] with three plays by Robertson Davies: *Eros at Breakfast*, *Overlaid* and *The Voice of the People*. Among the cast were Jo Pilcher (later Cormack) and Grant Reddick, both of whom were later to contribute much to theatre in Calgary.

While at the university, Risk also taught a regular acting class for Edmonton Little

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[89] Gordon Peacock, later to become head of the U. of A. Drama Division, was one of the students in these three plays.

[90] Who was a member of Calgary's Workshop 14.

Theatre, and directed *Ladies in Retirement* by Edward Percy, in which play Elsie Park Gowan appeared. Risk also gave a series of thirty fifteen-minute radio talks on CKUA called "Curtain Going Up", and directed a group of children in Indian legend radio plays for the same station.

His approach to Extension duties was, however, very different from that of Elizabeth Sterling Haynes. Where she had visited as many places as she could in the time allowed, Risk believed in giving more concentrated time to fewer groups. "His philosophy dictated that spending a more concentrated period of time with fewer groups would eventually result in higher quality productions."[91]

Esther Nelson took over the arduous position of Extension Drama Director from 1949 to 1962, ministering to the ever-growing drama needs of the province. Prior to 1949, she had been a member of Sidney Risk's Everyman Company in Vancouver, along with Bruno Gerussi and Ted Follows.[92] Before that, Nelson had worked with the Seattle Repertory Company She found that the interest in theatre and drama in the province had generally waned, so she had to begin again, travelling to the farthest points in order to generate enthusiasm. She felt that one of her first duties was to revive interest in the Dominion Drama Festival, and by the time of the Department's Annual Report of March 31, 1951, it was noted that there was a surge of drama activity in the province under

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[91] Linda Marilyn Potts, The Contributions of the Department of Extension, University of Alberta, In the Field of Drama Education from 1912-1962, MA thesis (University of Calgary) P.51.(UAA 83.28 Box 2)

[92] Both of whom were later in the original Stratford Shakespeare season in 1953.

Nelson's leadership. She had managed this essentially by encouraging community festivals and drama workshops. In 1954, Esther Nelson was awarded the Canadian Drama Award.

In 1956, Duncan Campbell was appointed Director of Extension, and by 1962, when Nelson left the Department, she could, in her own words "see that . . . Alberta Culture was each year putting . . . more money into their program," and she spoke of the reluctance of Duncan Campbell to do the same.[93] Don Pimm had written a letter (undated) to Gordon Peacock, in which he quoted his own letter to Duncan Campbell about Extension Drama: "The place of drama in the extension program of the University is a crucial one" (UAA 92.22 Box 1 Department of Drama). Nonetheless, when Esther Nelson left the Department, the position was abolished. In 1945, the Drama Division of the Department of Fine Arts was established in the Faculty of Arts. In 1946, Robert Orchard was appointed to head the Division. He also took over Sidney Risk's University Provincial Players in the spring of 1947. At that time, six players toured, in a 14-passenger bus, playing one performance a day in thirty towns from Mundare and Vermilion to Medicine Hat and the Crowsnest area. The final performance was given at the Banff School. (UAA 92.22. Box 1- Drama Department)

The Drama Division had presented its plays in Convocation Hall, but when Robert Orchard was appointed, he felt that the venue was completely unsuitable for stage productions. A number of army huts (called Quonset huts) had been brought on to the

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[93]Potts, The Contributions of . . . Extension, p.94

campus to accommodate the great number of extra classes needed after the war, when the servicemen came home, ready to use their post-war credits at the university. Robert Orchard, unhappy with the stage and general facilities of Convocation Hall, was able to lay claim to two of these huts, which were located side by side on the campus. By 1949, the Drama Division was ready to open its first show in the Quonset Huts. One hut became the theatre proper: the stage and wings, the 149-seat auditorium, and the lighting and sound booth. The other hut contained the foyer, the offices of Robert Orchard and the general manager, two dressing rooms, and a workshop. The buildings were joined by two short, closed-in walkways; one leading from the workshop to the stage, the other leading from the foyer to the main auditorium.

A report from Orchard (undated) had laid out plans for the Quonset huts, and for the drama program in general.(UAA 22 Box 1, Department of Drama). The theatre was called, at first, The Theatre Centre. At a meeting of the Department of Fine Arts on September 8, 1950, it was amended to Studio Theatre.[94] It is worth looking at Orchard's plans in some detail. He set them down as follows:

> *For the purposes of the present brief, we call it a "Theatre Centre".*
>
> *The work of the Centre would have three main categories;*
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> *1) <u>The training of teachers in dramatics:</u>. . . the main thing lacking in the training of these teachers is the experience of seeing a variety of good plays, well done, from backstage and audience viewpoint . . . .*

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[94] Orchard had chosen the name because he wanted the theatre to be a studio space for the young student actors to experiment and learn.

It is <u>not</u> proposed that this centre be a "School of the Theatre" or even become one later. The courses given, plus the practical experience, should, however, be a good foundation for advanced work to be taken elsewhere.

2) <u>Value to the University as a whole:</u> . . . A certain amount of use can be made of [the students'] efforts both as technicians and actors. There are, however, severe limitations placed on their effective and whole-hearted participation by the demands made by their courses and the concern of their departments that they do not get involved in extra-curricular activities of a demanding nature, no matter how valuable this may be to their personal and cultural development. In the main the plays should be performed by the best adults available either from the University staff or from the city (much as the Hart House Players used to be). They should be given as professional a treatment as possible. There should be at least five major productions a season.

There has been quite a bit of discussion of late about the lack of "the humanities" in both school and university . . . drama presents a unique opportunity for helping to remedy this lack . . . Theatre does not exist in theprinted page, and cannot, alas, be "canned". It exists solely in the live performance.

It is equally unsound for any department to teach Aeschylus, Shakespeare, Racine, Sheridan, Ibsen and Shaw, merely as so much literature. . . .Almost every student participating in the production of the "Antigone" received an unforgettable lesson in ancient thought and culture, by daily contact with a great play . . . any person involved in the production of a good play . . .will be aware of the constantly deepening experience of seeing the production discussed and brought to performance day by day . . .The theatre has played too important a part in ancient and modern culture for the subject to become a mere additional handicraft for teachers or be relegated to literary and linguistic discussion.

3) <u>University Extension:</u> Present extension work in drama is confined entirely to the Department of Extension . . . It should be possible at a later date to run evening classes for Edmonton residents.

. . .To the province as a whole the "centre" would offer a focal point - an example of regular theatre practice and also of experiment . . .the

> *productions could be presented at weekends in nearby communities, or a small group sent out on more extended tours. This would gradually pave the way for a full-time professional touring company . . . .*

Orchard proposed that the staff should at first consist of a director, a technical assistant and a business assistant. He hoped that the theatre would do five productions a season, two from the classics, and one each from Shaw or Ibsen, from other modern plays, and from Canadian plays. It is quite obvious that he had no intention of training actors, and indeed would only use the students to support the lead actors from "town or gown". It is the opinion of Frank Glenfield, who worked closely with Orchard, both as business manager and actor, that Bob believed that had he put forward a proposal for the establishment of an acting school, it would have been politically unwise and unacceptable *at that particular time* in the history of the university. In those days, Education students had to take a Fine Arts option; one student, who later became a driving force in Canadian theatre, when asked why he had chosen drama, replied: "Well, I can't sing and I can't draw, so I had to take drama!" It should be noted, however, that Orchard gave great encouragement to those students whom he believed had talent.

The first Studio Theatre play of the 1949-1950 season was Pirandello's *Henry IV*, with Robert (Bob) Orchard in the lead. The play was also directed by Orchard, with the assistance of Elizabeth Sterling Haynes. During that first season, the theatre also staged a student production of *Antigone* by Sophocles. Most of the students came from rural Alberta and had never been exposed to live theatre, except for the occasional high school play. Orchard felt very strongly that experiencing live theatre was a necessary part of the

drama curriculum. Designers, also, were pressed into service from the Art Division, including H.G. Glyde, the head of the three divisions of the Fine Arts Department, Norman Yates and J.B. Taylor. Orchard's staunchest ally was Elizabeth Sterling Haynes. These two, together and separately, mounted plays by Molière, Shakespeare, Chekhov, and Shaw, as well as more modern plays by Robertson Davies, Gwen Pharis Ringwood, and Elsie Park Gowan – and the audiences came. Some of them may have come at first because of the opportunity to see theatre in a university setting, but they continued to come because the product was good.

Unfortunately, there was quite a bit of personal animosity towards Bob Orchard from both the vice-president, Dr. Walter Johns, and the head of the Banff School, Donald Cameron.[95] This was partly because of Orchard's close friendship with and loyalty to Mrs. Haynes. Although she had been one of the founders of the Banff School, Cameron was loath to give her her due. In his own book about the Banff School, *Campus in the Clouds*, he mentions her only briefly, and almost in passing. Dr. Johns, for his part, had strongly disapproved of her trip to New Brunswick with Ted Cohen. Bob Orchard had not helped his relationship with the vice-president by his idiosyncratic failure to keep strictly to a timetable, by his casual manner of dress, and by his rambling style of lecturing. In a memorandum on February 14, 1949, Donald Cameron complained about a demonstration which Orchard was to give to the general public in Banff. Cameron writes that not only was the lecture ill-prepared, the lecturer was also very late and

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[95]Later, Senator Donald Cameron.

unsuitably dressed "in an old pair of army trousers and army shirt just as if he had come out of the workshop."[96] But many of the students loved him, particularly those who were academically inclined, whose imaginations were fired by him, and who could see beyond his rumpled hair and his intense delivery.

Another bone of contention between Orchard and Cameron was that "Orchard was striving to strengthen and define the Drama Division, while Cameron fought to retain drama education within the Department of Extension."[97] In addition, according to Ray Whitehouse, who taught for a year in the Drama Division "[Orchard] had a profound disrespect for the Banff School, because he felt it tended to be a kind of fast, easy route through for dilletantes who wanted to spend a summer up at Banff and not work too hard."[98] Orchard had also had problems with the President of the University of Alberta, Robert Newton, again mainly because of Orchard's championing of Mrs. Haynes. But in 1951, Dr. Andrew Stewart became President of the University of Alberta. Fortunately, Dr. Stewart was very interested in and supportive of the theatre and its training. He was also a good friend of Elizabeth Sterling Haynes.

In the spring of 1952, the Studio Theatre went on tour through the Peace River country with Robert Orchard's production of Gwen Pharis Ringwood's play, *Widger's Way*. This tour was part of the provincial government's program, "Maytime in Alberta."

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[96]Potts, . . . The Contributions . . . of Extension, p.77.

[97]Ibid. p 78

[98]Ibid. p 80

The Drama Division virtually shut down, because in the play were Orchard, who was division head, and Frank Glenfield, who was business manager. In addition, there were drama students from the Faculty of Education, Tom Peacocke[99] and Clara Angeltvedt (later Hare); an Honours English student, Carl Hare;[100] a law student, John Moore;[101] Ted Kemp, later a philosophy professor; and actors from the wider community, Ted Patterson,[102] and Don and Betty Wilson.

The *Widger's Way* production led indirectly to an unexpected and unwelcome event. During a previous production – Chekhov's *Cherry Orchard*, with Elizabeth Sterling Haynes in the lead – Betty Wilson, who was working in the sound/light booth, suddenly saw the figure of a woman, dressed in clothes of a previous period, although not that of the play, walking across the back of the stage about eighteen inches above floor level, stopping partway to look at Elizabeth, then moving offstage. Nothing further happened of a supernatural nature until the end of the 1951-1952 season. Some of the actors and other volunteers in *Widger's Way* were clearing up and cleaning the theatre when they heard loud sounds coming from the roof, as if people were jumping on it. They looked outside, as the noises on the roof continued, but there was no one there. They went back into the theatre workshop, then decided to go into the theatre itself to see

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[99]Later Chair of the University of Alberta Department of Drama.

[100]Later Chair of the University of Alberta Department of Drama.

[101]Now a Supreme Court judge.

[102]Who later joined the Winnipeg Ballet.

if there was anyone there. As they approached the door leading to the stage, the handle began to turn by itself. The people who were in this group of volunteers were Carl Hare, Tom Peacocke, Frank Glenfield, John Moore, and Jim Grayson-Smith. They formed a sort of chain to actually open the door, with Tom leading the way. When they got onto the darkened stage, they felt the whirring of something like books going past their heads. Shortly after that, all the lights went on by themselves, and there were no books to be seen anywhere. At this point, the flats which were stored in the workshop suddenly fell down, and the back door flung open on its own. No explanation was ever discovered.

By the time the group went on tour, they had begun to apply the name "Elsie" to the strange events and the original apparition. The tour was uneventful until the return journey. The company was travelling in two cars and a panel truck, which carried the sets, costumes and props. The truck was driven, in turn, by Carl Hare and Ted Kemp, and was ahead of the others when, just north of Westlock, the rest of the cast came upon the damaged panel truck in the ditch, with blood on the steering wheel. Carl Hare and Ted Kemp had been taken to the Westlock hospital, Ted with three broken ribs and a pierced kidney, Carl with a severed ear which was successfully reattached with needle and thread. Later, when the shaken actors went through the Studio Theatre front door into the lobby, there was a terrific crash from the workshop, just as before. They rushed there to see what had happened to the flats, only to find that nothing had fallen down, and nothing was out of place. Frank Glenfield says that they all tried to keep it fairly quiet, in case other people would think that they were all a bunch of kooks! Subsequently,

however, many of the later student actors, particularly at Corbett Hall, were convinced that there was a ghost called Elsie there as well![103]

In the spring of 1954, the Drama Division decamped again, this time to Victoria, for the finals of the Dominion Drama Festival. They took Elizabeth Sterling Haynes's production of *Othello*, with Alan Hood playing the title rôle, his wife Rosemary playing Desdemona, and Bob Orchard as Iago. Others in the play were Don and Betty Wilson, Ted Kemp, Frank Glenfield, and Carl Hare, as well as Robert Folinsbee, Chairman of the Geology Department, Charlie Stelck from the same Department, and Dr. Frank Keeping, Chairman of Mathematics.[104]

During Robert Orchard's tenure, from 1947 to 1955, many community actors, as well as university staff, were used at Studio Theatre. This was partly because of their immediate availability, and partly in accord with Orchard's belief that the students should be exposed to good plays done by good actors. It was also, it must be said, in some measure because he felt that the students were not experienced enough to be able to perform, except in small parts. Peacock took over as interim Director of Drama for the 1953 -1954 season, and subsequently became Head of the Drama Division and Artistic

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[103]From a discussion with Frank Glenfield.

[104]The plays, in those early years, ranged from Shakespeare's *The Tempest* and *Othello*, through Molière's *School for Wives* and *The Would-be Gentleman*, Chekhov's *Cherry Orchard* and Pirandello's *Right You Are If You Think So*, through Giraudoux's *Madwoman of Chaillot* and *The Enchanted*, to O'Casey's *Silver Tassie*, O'Neill's *Anna Christie* (with a long-time community actress, Mary Samuels, in the play), and *At My Heart's Core* by Robertson Davies.

Director of Studio Theatre before the 1955-1956 season. In 1965, he became Chair of the newly-named Department of Drama, a position which he held until 1972, when Tom Peacocke succeeded him Both Gordon Peacock and Tom Peacocke were taught by Robert Orchard.

Orchard and Peacock were each supported and encouraged by Mrs. Haynes, who, although never on permanent staff, was a sessional instructor *par excellence* from 1953 to 1955, and who was the Studio Theatre's constant link with the wider theatre community. This was particularly important during the tenure of Robert Orchard, as he used many actors from the wider Edmonton theatrical community. She also believed in using the student actors in suitable parts. Tom Peacocke remembers the student cast in Synge's *Playboy of the Western World*, in which he played the leading rôle of Christy Mahon. He says that most of the cast had never heard of the play, and were certainly not attuned to the period in which it was set. But Mrs. Haynes made the actors "see" the background of Ireland at that period, and also made the characters accessible to them, so that they understood the people they were playing. She would have long talks with individual actors, discussing how they felt about the part itself, how their own lives were akin to, or alien to, the character they were playing. As one who also was directed by Mrs. Haynes, I know how much stress she laid on each actor finding the spine of the character, and also finding a master gesture for the rôle. She would also discuss the period, the habits of the people in the play, and the general manners and *mores* of the time in which it was set.

Neither Bob Orchard nor Gordon Peacock had the time, nor perhaps the inclination, to involve themselves with community theatre as directors, organizational members, designers, or active working participants of one kind or another. Doing so was not the same thing as using community actors at the Studio Theatre; both directors, particularly Orchard, certainly used them there. Orchard and Peacock, however, had very different visions for the function and future of the Drama Division. Although Robert Orchard wanted the students to see good theatre, he felt that "students were apt to benefit more from apprenticing in or watching good productions than from simple course work."[105] Gordon Peacock, on the other hand, saw the Drama Department as essentially a training-ground for Canadian actors. His vision for the drama program was geared to its final consummation – the BFA program in 1965 for the training of future professional actors. It was not until the opening of the outdoor Studio Theatre summer season at the Torches Theatre in 1962, under the leadership of Tom Peacocke, that the community theatre people again began to be used to any great extent, together with students who lived in Edmonton, or who had remained in the city over the summer.

The Alumni Players went some way towards filling the gap. On September 10, 1955, a meeting was held to explore the possibility of setting up a University of Alberta Alumni Players group. Those present at the meeting were Gordon Peacock, Walter Kaasa, Don Pimm, Roy Lightfoot and Alice Polley.[106] It was agreed that the new group

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[105]Day, E.S.H. . . . Alberta Theatre, p. 308

[106]Three of these – Pimm, Kaasa, and Polley – spearheaded the Pirikapo Players.

should meet monthly, and have a Board of Directors consisting of five Alumni members. The head of the Department of Drama would be the permanent advisor, and it was agreed that a Technical Advisor should also be appointed. The plays were to be staged at the Studio Theatre as part of its season. On October 3, 1955, an official name was chosen for the group: University of Alberta Alumni Players, Studio A. Gordon Peacock strongly encouraged the group. It was an opportunity for the Alumni to expand its season in the early years; in addition, many of the group had been trained at the University of Alberta, encouraging the development of a strong tradition of production and performance in Edmonton. It would also, and very importantly, help the Drama Division to fill out its season.

The group's first play, in its first season 1955 –1956, was *Mr. Arcularis* by Conrad Aiken, directed by Don Pimm, with Walter Kaasa in the lead. The following year, Studio A mounted *The Country Girl* by Clifford Odets, directed by John Rivet. In the cast were Shirley Higginson, Tom Peacocke, Stuart Carson, and Don Pimm. The play later went to the Alberta Drama League finals of the Dominion Drama Festival in Lethbridge. Shirley Higginson won the award for best actress, but the play did not win for best production.

In 1958, *Charley's Aunt* by Brandon Thomas was directed by Harold Baldridge[107] for the Alberta government's "Maytime in Alberta." This play, too, came under the

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107 Who had just graduated in drama from the University of Alberta, who later went to the Neighborhood Playhouse in New York, and ultimately became its Director.

auspices of Alumni Studio A, called, for the occasion, The Touring Company of the University of Alberta Alumni. The name was suggested by Gordon Peacock. Some of the actors were Walter Kaasa, who had played the lead in the original Studio Theatre production of the Alumni Players in 1951, Tom Peacocke, Mary Humphrey (later Baldridge), Doug (later Gregory) Reid, Mary Glenfield and Alan Sheppard. They were billeted in homes from Edson to Stettler to Drumheller. The present writer remembers, to her amazement, being told by one of the student actresses in the play how nice it was that they were able to take drama at university, instead of going to a *drama school*, where you might meet up with all kinds of not very nice people! This shows not only the protected environment in which some of the students had been raised, but also how much some of them had to learn.

In 1957, the Quonset huts were slated for demolition to make way for the construction of the Cameron Library. For a time, it seemed that the Department of Drama's Studio Theatre home would be lost. On September 23, 1957, the University of Alberta Alumni Players sent a letter to the Board of Governors of the University, stating their concerns about the possible closing down of the Department of Drama (UAA 92-22 Box 1 File 6). Subsequently, Alice Polley, Secretary of the Alumni Players, Studio A, wrote a personal letter to President Andrew Stewart. As late as the end of September 1957, it seemed that there would be no 1957-1958 season.

But then an offer came from the Dean of the Faculty of Education, Dr. Herbert Coutts, who was himself very interested in theatre. The Studio Theatre could use the

theatre in the Education Building (later named Corbett Hall). Unfortunately, there was a year's hiatus, the problem of which was solved by the productions being performed in Convocation Hall. So the Studio Theatre seasons continued, hardly missing a beat, although it only mounted three plays in the 1957 –1958 and the 1958 –1959 seasons. The Alumni Players' play for the 1957 –1958 season was Laurence and Lee's *Inherit the Wind*, directed by Tom Peacocke, with Walter Kaasa, John Rivet, and Stuart Carson among the very large cast. Stuart Carson had, for many years. been active in both the Little and Community Theatres; he was also a superb make-up artist, whose assistance was sought in many productions. At a meeting of the Alumni Players on February 22, 1959, it was agreed that membership in Studio A should be extended to wives and husbands of members. In truth, many cast members in the various plays prior to this, had not actually been university alumni.

In January 1959, Studio A produced *The Lark* by Jean Anouilh, which was performed at the Alberta Regional Drama Festival in Edmonton, having already been staged at Studio Theatre. It was directed by Gordon Peacock, with the lead played by Irene Prothroe (née Powlan), who had taught in the University's Drama Division for the 1951 to 1952 season, and who was now taking her drama degree.[108] Also in the cast

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[108] Irene was from Calgary, where her father was a Chinese herbalist; her mother was English, from Liverpool. She had been at school and in Workshop 14 with Frank Glenfield, who was instrumental in helping her get the job at the Drama Division in 1951, after she had trained in Los Angeles with Charles Laughton and with Maria Ouspenskaya, one of Stanislavski's co-teachers at the Moscow Arts Theatre. Irene died of a brain aneurysm on October 11, 1989.

were John Rivet, Stuart Carson, Tom Peacocke, and Elsie Park Gowan. The same season, 1958 to 1959, the B.A. Drama program was granted by the Faculty of Arts and established in the Department. This meant that, instead of taking drama as one subject in, for instance, an Arts or Education degree, students were now able to concentrate on drama as their main subject. However, a BA Drama Major student who wished to enter the professional theatre still had to take training at an advanced drama school, before being ready to work as a professional. It would be another seven years till the BFA degree was established, and it is permissible to wonder if the Drama BA was perhaps seen, albeit subconsciously, as simply a stepping-stone on the way to the BFA. In other words, each "advance" was upwards, towards a pinnacle, instead of being an essential part of a whole design.

The Alumni Players' production of the 1959-1960 season was *Time Remembered* by Jean Anouilh, directed by John Rivet. In the cast were Stuart Carson, Elaine Polovnikoff,[109] Garry Mitchell, Frank Glenfield, and Jack Wilson. Already, the support of the members must have been slipping; there is a note in the Minutes (UAA 92-22 Box 1 File 6) that Rivet expressed his disappointment that more of the members had not come out for the auditions, or to help with the production.

The University Dramatic Society was much older than the Alumni. It had been founded in 1911, with its first production being mounted in 1913. In fact, it was the

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109 Who had also been in two of Circle Eight's plays: *A Streetcar Named Desire* and *Visit to a Small Planet.*

company for which Mrs. Haynes directed her first play in Edmonton – *Dear Brutus* by J.M. Barrie on January 29 and 30, 1923. This was the beginning of a fruitful seven-year collaboration. Plays were directed by people from the university or the community, including Haynes, Eva Howard, and Sidney Risk. In 1953 the Dramatic Society produced Marlowe's *Doctor Faustus,* directed by Alan Hood, who worked on campus for CKUA;[110] in the cast were Tom Peacocke, John Moore, Carl Hare, Gil Brinsmead, Tom Aspland, Brian Cumming and Georgina Tingey. The cast thought it might be fun to make a model of Shakespeare's Globe Theatre, to be displayed during the run of the play. Brian Cumming (a Medical student), and Carl Hare (an Honours English student) were the President and Vice-President respectively of the Drama Society, and they decided to build a large model of the Globe Theatre in Brian's basement. All went well, and they were very pleased with themselves, only to discover that they couldn't get it out of the basement! The Dramatic Society was still in existence in 1960-1961, and entered the Alberta Drama League One-Act Festival, as well as presenting the Interfaculty Play Festival at Studio Theatre(UAA 69-82-4-9A 95-64 U of A Drama.Scty).

In 1961 Studio A put on *Barefoot in Athens* by Maxwell Anderson. Joy Coghill, who had already made her name in Vancouver professional theatre, was brought in specially to direct this play. She was the first outside professional director ever hired by Studio Theatre, and this had been a longtime ambition of Gordon Peacock. In the cast

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[110]He and his wife, Rosemary, had both been on the professional stage in England.

were Stuart Carson, John Rivet, Lois Jha (née MacLean),[111] Richard Gishler, Wally McSween, Garry Mitchell and Len Crowther. The review by John Bilsland was devastating. "The play . . . was pretentious and vulgar. . . The direction was generally uninteresting. And not one of the actors gave any real indication of his true value" (TT May 1961). And, said Bilsland: "I had the unpleasant feeling throughout that I was being fed potted higher learning – with no credit to either the learning, the teacher or me . . . the blatant, insensitive debasing of Attic thought and culture into a heralding of the values of twentieth-century North America.."

However, John Bilsland was much more pleased with Tom Peacocke's production of *The Visit* by Friedrich Duerrenmatt the following year. "Studio Theatre's production was an impressive achievement. . . Olga Roland was almost unbelievably effective as Claire Zachanassian. . . If Studio Theatre were offering nothing else this winter this production alone would. . .remind us . . . of the great and valuable part played by this group in the life of Edmonton"(TT Apr 1962). By this time, both Frank Bueckert[112] and Tom Peacocke were Assistant Professors of Drama. Another development occurred at this time. In the Drama Department's Annual Report for 1960-1961, a new organization was proposed, to be called the Studio Theatre Players. This was to be composed of

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[111]Who had acted with the University Provincial Players and Everyman Theatre.

[112]Who had joined the Drama Department in 1955.

students interested in drama[113] who wished to work in Studio Theatre productions. All productions, except those of the Alumni Players, should be cast from members of this new organization, with non-student actors appearing as guest artists. There were to be ten performances of five productions per year.

A manifesto (UAA 92-22 Box 1 File 5) was produced: three pages of intent, membership qualifications, rules and responsibilities. It is worth quoting the first two sections.

Purpose

1) To produce plays of classic calibre, as professionally as possible, under Drama Department guidance.

2) To develop the talents of each member in an atmosphere of dedication and artistry.

3) To further the work of the Studio Theatre through professional participation and behaviour.

There were also many rules about the decorum of being in a play, such as don't giggle on stage, don't whisper in the wings. Any drama student or student interested in drama was eligible to become a member. In fact, any non-student could become a member, but only student members could become part of the Advisory Committee. The new organization appears to have served a need, since it thrived. A number of its productions were produced in The Theatre Upstairs at Corbett Hall. This was a large rehearsal room on the second floor, across the hall from the balcony entrances. Among the plays staged by

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113 Presumably this was intended to apply to students of any Faculty, whether Science, Arts, Medical or Engineering.

the Studio Theatre Players were *Three Actors and Their Drama* by Michel de Ghelderode, directed by Tom Peacocke; *La Ronde* by Arthur Schnitzler, director not listed; a double-bill, *Women at the Tomb* by Ghelderode, directed by Ken Smith,[114] *The Chairs* by Eugene Ionesco, directed by Harry Hill; and *Waiting for Godot* by Samuel Beckett, directed by Lee Royce.

The summer of 1962 saw the beginning of the Torches Theatre summer seasons. Three plays were staged in repertory: *Dark of the Moon* by Howard Richardson and William Bernay, directed by Gordon Peacock ; *Our Town* by Thornton Wilder, directed by Tom Peacocke;[115] and *Under Milk Wood* by Dylan Thomas, directed by Don Pimm. He had directed the first Studio Theatre production of the play in 1960, before remounting it for the first Torches season. The Torches seasons had good audiences from the very beginning. The plays were put on in an open courtyard, outside Corbett Hall. Steps from this courtyard led into the building itself, right beside the stage, which meant that on cold and/or wet evenings, a play could be moved into Studio Theatre, although this rarely had to be done. At the end of the summer season, a reading of poetry, and later folk songs, was staged, directed by Tom Peacocke, at first chosen and collated by Wilfred Watson, and later by Jon Whyte. This was named *From Under the Black Bridge* in honour of

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Now known as Ken Agrell-Smith, a veteran and highly-regarded teacher of drama at Harry Ainlay Composite High School in Edmonton.

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Both of these plays featured Kenneth Welsh in the lead; he has since been in many films and T.V. plays, and has appeared in Canadian and American theatre.

Edmonton's High Level Bridge, the closest bridge to the university, built in 1912 by the Canadian Pacific Railway, linking the north side of the city with the south side.

In 1962, Wilfred Watson's fascinatingly convoluted genius burst upon the Studio Theatre stage. Gordon Peacock directed Watson's *Cockrow and the Gulls*; in the leads were Kenneth Welsh, Hutchison Shandro, Sheila Daniels (later Gynane), Tom Peacocke, Garry Mitchell, Bud D'Amur and Betty Evans. The play was subjected to many rewrites, with the playwright and director in constant consultation, and the actors themselves sometimes needing alterations when they found the written words impossible to speak. It was a very convoluted play; ideas of good and evil were both abstract ideas in the play, and also embodied in Watson's own childhood memories. It was also very confusing to many members of the audience, who found it both difficult to understand and impossible to identify with any of the characters. *Cockrow and the Gulls* caused some disquiet in the audience; but, by 1962, the Western world had been dazzled by the Kennedy regime in the United States, disturbed by the beginnings of university student unrest, and was becoming accustomed to young people making their way to communes or beaches. Audiences were both more open to ideas which might have shocked them in another generation, and were willing to suspend judgement. So the reaction to the play was much less strident than it would have been ten years earlier. Nonetheless, there were audience members who walked out at many performances. You might think that the Department of Drama would begin several years of experimental plays, and designs for plays. But the Studio Theatre seasons continued to be a mixture of modern plays and classics, giving the students a solid

grounding in all periods and styles of theatre. Not until 1967 did the stage explode with another Wilfred Watson play: *Oh Holy Ghost, Dip Your Finger in the Blood of Canada and Write I Love You*. This play was commissioned under an award from the Edmonton Civic Centennial Committee for the BFA graduating class to perform at Studio Theatre. It was directed by Tom Peacocke and designed by Leonard Feldman and Gwen Cardinal.

In the summer of 1962, just after the first Torches season, Tom Peacocke resigned from the Department of Drama to take up the position of Assistant Professor of Drama at the Carnegie Institute of Technology and Art in Pittsburgh, where he had received his MFA in directing. This was a great loss to University of Alberta drama, and these were big shoes to fill. However, Gordon Peacock persuaded Dr. Betty Mitchell to come from Calgary to serve as Assistant Professor of Drama for the 1962-1963 season.

In June 1963, Circle Eight, having become defunct in 1961, donated all its costumes and sets to the Studio Theatre.[116] There had been hard feelings between the groups when Theatre Associates was founded.. Jack McCreath and Mickey Macdonald had not only been at Victoria High School together, but had also been friends for many years after. Both had acted in plays together, and with the beginning of the new group, most of the board members of Circle Eight felt a definite sense of betrayal. However, this feeling did not last, and later on, Mickey herself was in several Walterdale plays.

In the early summer of 1963, after only one year in Pittsburgh, Tom Peacocke was

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This was done through Audrey Grisdale, who would probably have died rather than see Walterdale get any of them!

reappointed to the staff of the Drama Division. As a result, the Torches seasons, and their finales *From Under the Black Bridge*, continued seamlessly until 1971. In 1963, his first year back, Tom Peacocke directed, for the Torches, a brilliant production of the musical, *The Fantasticks*, with Ray Phipps and Crystal Fleuty in the leads. The summer of 1964 saw two plays produced by the Torches — *Picnic* by William Inge, and the musical *Leave It To Jane*. The poetry and folk songs that year were dedicated to the memory of John F. Kennedy, and the program was sent to his widow, Jacqueline Kennedy, who replied with a personal letter of thanks to Tom Peacocke and the Department of Drama.

Meanwhile, the Studio Theatre Players continued, and silver replicas of the Studio Theatre signet[117] were given to various members on their being accepted as permanent members of the Players. Among them were Lee Royce, Esther Norville, Tom Peacocke, Betty Mitchell, and Ted Kemp, as well as Frank Bueckert, who continued as Faculty Co-ordinator of the Players.

However, the Alumni Players were finding that their group was becoming superfluous. It had originally been a godsend for the Drama Division to fill out the season, and to provide trained and experienced helpers for the other Studio Theatre plays. On November 4, 1963, a general meeting of the Alumni members was held to discuss the fate of the organization. It was generally agreed that Studio Theatre no longer had a need for the Alumni, and that the original members were now too busy to attempt a resuscitation of the group. Ted Kemp suggested that, instead of disbanding, the Alumni

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[117]A design by H.G. Glyde of a Haida Indian mask, with the letter S superimposed.

Players should select a number of presentations which would be suitable for the Theatre Upstairs. This would, at least, mean that former students and other actors would keep in contact with the Drama Division.

Just two years later, not only did the Drama Division become a full Department, but also the first professional undergraduate programs were established; the BFA in Acting,[118] and the BFA in Theatre Design. In one of life's strange coincidences, the 1965-1966 season was also the first year of the Citadel Theatre. This was the catalyst from which sprang many other professional theatres in Edmonton, a number of them spearheaded by University of Alberta drama graduates; and these, in turn, became employers of other Department of Drama graduates, especially those from the BFA programs.[119]

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118 The first graduate from the program – Elan Ross Gibson – had received her degree one year later, because she had enough credits already to be allowed to complete the BFA degree in one year.

119 There was a completion of the circle in 1968, with the establishment of the MFA degrees in Directing and Theatre Design, and also the MA program.

Chapter Four. Children's Theatre

In the burst of theatrical activity in Edmonton during the 1950s, it is no surprise to find that children were not forgotten. Plays for children had already been produced by the Little and Community Theatres, as part of their seasons. However, there was no specific group or groups, whose sole purpose was to cater to the viewing needs of children. Parents, and adults generally, were anxious for their young ones to have many of the recreational experiences which they themselves enjoyed. These included sports and social activities, and also theatre. In 1951, two children's theatre groups sprang up, spearheaded by Bernice Dorskind: the Edmonton Children's Theatre, and the Peter Pan Players. Dorskind was a recent University of Alberta graduate who had acted at Studio Theatre, and was now working on contract for the Edmonton Parks and Recreation Commission. She initiated an Edmonton Children's Theatre that spring to perform plays in the city playgrounds over the summer.

In July 1951, seven performances of *Little Black Sambo* and *Circus Day* were given at seven city playgrounds(EJ.Jul 6, 1951). The number of performances grew to twelve, and were attended by 2,400 children and parents (EJ.Sep 22,1951). The stage and seating were the grass; the set was a series of painted, sliding screens; the props and costumes were minimal. The players were aged from 15 to 20 years.[120] This was a

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These were: Sheila Brown, Ardis Dahl, Paula Downey, Richard Dunlop, Claire Galloway, Barbara Garrett, Marlene Impey, George Keith, Donald Knowles, Gladys Maguta, Daphne McLean, Arline McMicking, Margery Mick, Eleanor Moss, Ricky Richardson, Ron Soderburg, and Mildred Staples. To my knowledge, only McMicking and Moss went on into the wider community or university theatres.

venture to which people from the various community theatres gave their support: all rehearsals and construction work were carried on at the Recreation Commission, Prince Rupert House, and the Community Theatre workshop. There were also weekly classes for the group, given by Esther Nelson, Lois McLean, Bernice Dorskind, Alta Mitchell, and Jo Pilcher (later Cormack).[121]

By the Fall of 1951, the group had its own junior executive: Claire Galloway, President; Richard Dunlop, Vice-President; Marlene Impey, Secretary; Paula Downey and Ricky Richardson, Publicity. There was also a senior advisory board consisting of Esther Nelson, Chairman; Marguerite Duffy, Stage Manager; Alta Mitchell, Costume Mistress; Jo Pilcher, House Manager; and Bernice Dorskind, Business Manager.(EJ, Sep. 22, 1951)

In December 1951, the second group called the Peter Pan Players, mounted two plays for children at Studio Theatre. This time, it was adults performing two plays for children: *Eventful Eve*, an original play conceived by the players themselves, and *The Christmas Star* by Dorothy Jane Goulding. Some of the people, either in the cast or working backstage, were Craig Elliott, Isadore Gliener, Betty Mardiros, Mary Wynne Moar, Grant Reddick, Vicky Van Vliet, and Don and Betty Wilson (EJ Dec.22,1951). All these people were connected, either as students or volunteers, with Studio Theatre at the University of Alberta. After 1951, no further plays appear to have been produced by either group.

Bette Anderson was head of the children's theatre component of the Seattle

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[121]Member of University Drama Society, University Provincial Players and Studio Theatre.

Repertory Company; this is where she met Esther Nelson, who was her main Edmonton connection. They became close friends, and in 1953, Bette Anderson became Director of the Drama Division of the Edmonton Recreation Commission.

At the beginning of the 1950s, the House UnAmerican Activities Committee continued to cast its shadow over all the artistic groups in the United States. Since the two main movers and shakers of the Seattle Repertory, Mr. and Mrs. Burton James, had been to the Moscow Arts Theatre for training, they were naturally suspect. So the committee zeroed in on the Repertory Company,[122] which was disbanded and destroyed, some of its members going to Canada and some to the eastern United States, where one of Bette Anderson's friends, unable to find work, threw himself under a New York subway train.[123] The Jameses went to Saskatchewan, where Burton James died in 1954, virtually a broken man. Florence James, his widow, worked for many years as drama consultant for the Saskatchewan Arts Board. So, from this sad ending of a flourishing repertory company, Bette Anderson came to Edmonton. She had been first approached by the city in 1952 to handle dramatic activities for Parks and Recreation, but she had declined the offer. However, in 1953, the city brought her up to Edmonton from Seattle to meet the people involved with the Parks and Recreation Department. This time she accepted the offer. She brought with her a wealth of ideas and experience. The Junior League in the

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[122] Aided, to some extent, by the University of Washington's drama head, Glenn Hughes, who later took possession of the Repertory building for the university.

[123] Told to the writer by Bette Anderson.

United States was a service organisation which had been involved for many years in voluntary work for children's hospitals, and had also been active for many years as a sponsor of children's theatre. So Anderson turned to the organization in Edmonton, which was not yet a full-fledged League, but a Junior Hospital League. Until this time, their main theatrical activity had been The Follies, which they put on every year as a fund-raiser at Victoria High School.

In June, 1953, Elizabeth Sterling Haynes had pledged a Women's Theatre Guild Scholarship for the training of an assistant director for the proposed children's theatre group. Moira Day wrote: "[Haynes] also talked the local Junior Hospital League into lending their sponsorship to the project."[124] Elise Duggan and Virginia Van Vliet were the contacts from the Junior Hospital League, and they invited John Farina and Bette Anderson, respectively the director and new drama head of the Recreation Commission, to speak at a meeting of the League on September 15, 1953. Bette Anderson and the League board drew up a plan for Theatre for Children; the plays were to be produced by the League members, and directed mainly by Anderson. She gave a brief overview of the children's theatre of the Seattle Repertory Company, and said that: " Acting for children must be the same as for adults, only better" (EJ, Oct.14,1953). This was a theme which she was to drive home to her actors again and again. She felt very strongly that young audiences must *never* be talked down to. The first play was scheduled at Studio Theatre for February 1954.

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[124]Day, E.S.H. . . Alberta Theatre, p.320

As it turned out, the opening of Theatre for Children was delayed until October 7, 1954. The play was *The Wizard of Oz* at Victoria Composite High School auditorium, directed by Bette Anderson, with the lead played by Judy Unwin, whose father and mother, Jack and Maureen, had been active in Edmonton community theatre since the late 1920s. Mrs. Haynes wrote a glowing letter to the *Edmonton Journal*, in which she praised the production and the Junior Hospital League and Recreation Commission for their sponsorship. She said that "an expression of gratitude is due to these dedicated women who gave pleasure to seventy-five hundred Edmonton children"(EJ.Nov.6, 1954).

From then on, two plays were produced every year, mostly on Saturdays, and many were written by Charlotte Chorpenning from the Kentucky Press. The women of the Junior Hospital League worked exceedingly hard on publicity, on the links with various schools in the area, and on making beautiful costumes and props for each production. Detta Lange designed the sets and costumes. Her husband, Hannes, was also a great part of the overall organization, helping to paint the sets and build some of the props. Detta brought the use of Linnebach slides[125] from Germany for adding depth to sets, as well as unusual lighting designs. The League members were in charge of the programs and manned the front of house for each production. Some of the first plays were: *Simple Simon* in 1955, *Aladdin* and *Little Red Riding Hood* in 1956, and *The Elves and the*

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The Linnebach lantern, or projector is a "theatrical lighting device, by which silhouettes, colour, and broad outlines can be projected as part of the background scenery. . . developed in the 19th century by Adolf Linnebach."(The Encyclopædia Britannica, Vol. VI, 15th edition, 1976).

Shoemaker, and *Once Upon a Clothesline* in 1957. This latter play was revived in 1962, and John Bilsland wrote a glowing review of it. "As I have come to expect of Theatre for Children, the play was given a sensitive and highly imaginative production" (TT Dec. 1962). He praised the sets by Detta Lange, Joan Byrne and Harry Hartland, and spoke of "the sure, sensitive direction of Bette Anderson." He ended by saying: "I am convinced that some of the best theatre work being done at the present time in Edmonton is that of Theatre for Children."

At Easter 1958, from April 8 – 12, Bette Anderson and the Recreation Commission produced *Fresh From Heaven* in the Jubilee Auditorium's Social Room. This was a play with music about Johnny Appleseed, directed by Frank Glenfield, and assisted by Phillip Silver. The cast of fifty included many children, as well as Wally McSween, newcomer Len Crowther, Vern Ray, Elaine Polovnikoff and two small Unwins, Judy and Janey. Also, George Ryga[126] played a minor part as a law enforcement officer, although his name is not on the program since he filled in after it had gone to press. *Fresh From Heaven* attracted much the same audience as the other plays; that is to say, mainly groups of children from various schools, and occasionally their parents.. In fact, it is doubtful whether most people realised that the play was produced entirely by Parks and Recreation, and not by the Junior Hospital League as well. In addition to the children in

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He was working, at the time, as the night clerk at a small Edmonton hotel. He and Vern Ray also belonged to The Tamarack Singers. Ryga had yet to write his novels, *Hungry Hills* and *Ballad of a Stone-Picker*, and his first plays, *Indian* and *The Ecstasy of Rita Joe* were far in the future. He later gave Theatre Associates the first stage rights to his play, *Nothing But a Man*, which had been presented on the CBC as *Man Alive*.

the play, there were a dozen members of the Friendship Club, a seniors' organization, who played the parts of villagers and danced a square dance. Two of the elderly men, Mr. Stoney and Mr. Cole, had difficulty with Stage Left and Stage Right. The play had been rehearsed at the Recreation Building, but when the dress rehearsal was held at the Jubilee Auditorium, the director found the two men wandering about quite lost. When asked why they had not come on "stage right", one of them said, "Well, in the Rec Building, you told us to come on from the west, and now you're asking us to come on from the east!" In spite of this, the play had a good review in the *Edmonton Journal*, which called it "a triumph in staging. Director Frank Glenfield has taken the difficulties presented by the stage and the room and turned them into positive virtues," taking the cast on and off the stage into the audience, thus "putting the youngsters in the audience into exciting touch with the play" (EJ.Apr.9,1958). In fact, it was always the aim of Theatre for Children to put the children in touch with the play.

The June 1, 1958 Alberta Recreation Association's newsletter announced that Brian Way, from London, England, was to give a six-hour course to summer staff, and would later cast and rehearse his own version of *Pinocchio.* This, however, did not occur as planned; so in October 1958, Theatre for Children mounted its own production of this play under the direction of Bette Anderson, with Tom Peacocke, then teaching drama at Victoria Composite High School, in the role of Gepetto, the old toymaker. Two months later, at Christmas-time, Virginia Vogel was in Laine Mets Kriik's dance version of *The Little Match Girl*, together with *Amahl and the Night Visitors,* directed by G.K. Greene.

At Easter, 1959, the play was *Rumpelstiltskin*, again directed by Bette Anderson.

Henry Kreisel[127] was delighted by Theatre for Children. He wrote in Town Talk: "Even before I had a child of my own, I used to go and see Edmonton's Theatre for Children whenever I had the chance. This group . . . is now in its sixth season, and it has done a notable service to this community. The mark of a Bette Anderson production is that it never patronizes its audience" (CEA RG 21 18 TT Jan 1960). To be in one of these plays at Victoria Composite High School was a quite remarkable experience. The 750-seat theatre was always packed with children, who were on the whole amazingly well-behaved, although encouraged to express agreement and pleasure with the "good" characters, and, if they felt like it, boo the "bad" ones. Only very occasionally did actors have to dodge the flak from peashooters! By the end of every play, there would be small faces lined up along the edge of the stage, trying to get as close as possible to the action.

Having already directed one of Brian Way's plays, *Pinocchio*, Anderson was, more than ever, anxious to bring the author himself to Edmonton. Way had trained and later worked with Peter Slade, who had begun a children's theatre workshop in Manchester after the war. Both Slade and Way emphasized the crucial importance of a new look at the relationship between child audiences and what was taking place on the stage. Great stress was placed on the desirability of interaction between actors and audience. For many of the parents seeing the enthusiasm of the children, it was a new and

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127 Chair of the English Department at the University of Alberta, who had also acted at the Studio Theatre in the early 1950s, both with Mrs. Haynes and also directed by her.

exciting first exposure to live theatre. As many observers of Edmonton theatre have noted since, these young people were to become Edmonton's audiences of the future.

In addition to having written several plays, Way was constantly in demand as a lecturer on his and Peter Slade's theories, and in June 1959, Brian Way came to Edmonton to give lectures and workshops for Bette Anderson, under the auspices of Edmonton Parks and Recreation. Three people from Walterdale took his classes; John Rivet, Marjorie Knowler, and Frank Glenfield. All three found the lectures both stimulating and useful, particularly when teaching creative drama classes for Parks and Recreation, or in the schools. Theatre for Children produced two more Brian Way plays. At Christmas 1959, Bette Anderson directed *The Storytellers*, and at Easter 1960, *The Stranger*. Then in 1961, *Greensleeves Magic* was performed, with John Noreyko as Greensleeves, Reta Stocks as the Grand Duchess, and Addy Wintermans as Princess Miranda. All of these were produced at Victoria Composite High School. However, the audiences had grown so large that subsequent productions had to be produced at the Jubilee Auditorium. This was not a very satisfactory solution, from the point of view of either actors or audience. The sheer size and acoustical limitations of the 2,762-seat auditorium militated against any feeling of intimacy or involvement.

In 1960, Parks and Recreation created the Playground Players, another outlet for children's theatre. This company's work consisted of a series of improvisational performances at the various city parks and tot lots. The original players in the group were

Lloy Coutts,[128] John Madill,[129] Phillip Silver,[130] Shirley Forbes Burnham, and Judy Unwin.[131] These actors were later joined by Vic Sutton. The troupe had a heavy schedule, working at various playgrounds during the day, often from 9:30 in the morning to 8:30 at night. When they went into their second year in the summer of 1961, the *Edmonton Journal* called it "a theatrical experiment, unique in Canada," and said that "it makes demands of the actors that would appal most professionals"(EJ. Jul 15,1961). The young audiences were first asked which of their favourite characters they would like to see onstage, such as Peter Pan, the Three Bears, or Alice in Wonderland and others. It was a Playground Players' rule that the actors would not perform anything, or any character, which could be seen on television. The aim was to present something that the children would not ordinarily see, either in the theatre or on the screen. The Playground Players also appeared on CBC during the summer for the Western network.

Parks and Recreation was still providing creative drama programs for students,

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128 Who later went on to the National Theatre School, and then became the voice coach at the Stratford Shakespeare Festival.

129 Now working as the set designer for the Musical Theatre department of Grant McEwan College.

130 Phillip Silver went to the National Theatre School in Montreal, became a major designer at Stratford and Toronto, and was also resident designer for the Citadel Theatre in Edmonton. He is now the Dean of the Faculty of Fine Arts at York University in Toronto.

131 Who is still much involved with theatre in Edmonton, including Walterdale. Shadow Theatre and the Varscona consortium..

from children to adults. Stage movement and dance programs were given by Laine Mets Kriik, who had been in the Estonian National Ballet, and who ran a ballet school in Edmonton.

During the early years of the Playground Players, Bette Anderson trained the actors. Then in 1963, she became the Supervisor of Expressive Arts, covering dance, drama, and art. This was something of a City of Edmonton approximation to Alberta Culture, and in fact the two organizations worked closely together. Pat Lucas became the Edmonton Parks and Recreation Drama Supervisor, and thus took over the Playground Players' training as well as the overall responsibilities of production for Theatre for Children. However, Bette Anderson was still very involved. In October 1963, she directed a large production of *Aladdin* for Theatre for Children that had been adapted by the Playground Players. It was to play every Saturday all through the month, with two evening presentations on October 11 and 18. "Aladdin will call forth all the old magic in Theatre for Children. . . an adventure in wizardry. . . Alan Smith stars as Aladdin, Shirley Scott as the Princess, Eric Candy[132] the Magician, Philip Upright[133] the Genie. The production assistants will include Phillip Silver. . . Bob Gibbons,[134] John Madill. . . J.

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132 Who was very active in Edmonton with Community Theatre, Theatre Associates and Studio Theatre. He was also one of the founders of the television and radio training program at the Northern Alberta Institute of Technology.

133 Later to be involved with the professional children's theatre Stage Polaris, founded by Susan Woywitka in 1985.

134 Who continues to work with Walterdale Theatre Associates.

Baril,[135] Shirley Potter."[136] (EJ. Sep. 30, 1963).

In 1964, as Pat Lucas had left her job with Edmonton Parks and Recreation and moved to Vancouver, John Madill and Phillip Silver were originally going to take over as joint Drama Supervisors, but Phil decided to go to the National Theatre School, so John took over on his own.

With the founding of the Citadel Theatre in 1965, and the creation of more community programs and outlets for children across the city, including Citadel on Wheels, Theatre for Children was beginning to lose its audience. Bette Anderson was still involved with the training programs for the Recreation Department's Theatre Workshop. A series of classes was announced for the fall of 1966, the adult classes to be taught by Laine Mets (movement), Mary Stratton (speech), and Esther Nelson (acting). Students aged fourteen to sixteen would be taught by Bette Anderson and Frank Glenfield (acting), and Agnes Buckles (speech). The backstage workshop would be under the direction of Hugh Hicklin (EJ.Oct.12,1966).

In 1967, the productions of Theatre for Children were moved to the Centennial Library Theatre. That same year, Ken Kramer, who had been one of the original young actors in the plays, and his wife, Sue, came to Edmonton to start a new section of Theatre for Children and Parks and Recreation, called Teen Theatre. The first play they produced,

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[135]Also active in French theatre.

[136]Who was later to open a very successful costume and make-up store.

Raiders on the Wind, was a commissioned play written by Betty Wilson[137] and directed by Bette Anderson. But the Kramers did not stay in Edmonton, as they were already working at the Globe Theatre in Regina, the first professional theatre in Saskatchewan, which Ken had founded in 1966.

Things were gradually winding down. The Junior Hospital League, now the Junior League, had handed over the reins of Theatre for Children to the Junior Arts Council, headed by a Mrs. S. Gouin. The collaboration between the Hospital League and Theatre for Children had been easy and rewarding, but now there was friction because the new group wanted a much more hands-on part in the productions than the Parks and Recreation Department was willing to concede to them. So this was a warning that the beginning of the end was in sight. This was sad; in 1962 John Bilsland had written: "I must say that I am convinced that some of the best theatre work being done at the present time in Edmonton is that of Theatre for Children" (CEA RG 21 18 TT Dec 1962).

Bette Anderson married John Stoddart and moved to Vancouver in 1968. John Madill was summarily dismissed by Parks and Recreation in 1969, and Theatre for Children lay fallow for two years. Then Doug Riske and his wife, Paddy Campbell, were brought up from Calgary to resuscitate it, and they began Theatre Edmonton for Young Audiences (TEFYA). They stayed in Edmonton for only one year, since Doug co-founded and was appointed Artistic Director of Alberta Theatre Projects in Calgary in 1972. TEFYA ran for a number of years; only one person from the earlier Theatre for

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[137]Who had a long association with Studio Theatre.

Children productions was still involved with TEFYA, namely Frank Glenfield. But Theatre for Children, as such, was no more.

Chapter Five. Audience Education and Theatre Support

It is self-evident that a play needs an audience, in order for the production to be fully realised. And the more informed the audience, the better it will enjoy what is presented on stage. Also, a theatre group needs to have the backing of dedicated organisations and volunteers. For this reason, as has already been pointed out, the Edmonton Little Theatre, the Edmonton Community Theatre, Circle Eight and Walterdale Theatre Associates held playwriting seminars, technical workshops, and lectures on various aspects of drama. There have also been organizations not connected to one specific group, which have had as their purpose, the support of theatre generally in the city. I propose to discuss three such groups in this section.

The Edmonton Drama Council was founded by Clarence Richards in 1950. He owned the Co-Op Press in the city, which printed books and many of the programs for plays and drama festivals. Richards was an interesting man; he had taught for thirty-five years at Victoria High School, and had founded the Kinsmen Club in Edmonton in 1920. He also began the Institute of Applied Art, which published mail-order classes for students. When the Kinsmen Club and the Institute were well under way, he spearheaded a football team called the Hi Grads. In 1944, Clarence Richards became the first chairman of the Recreation Commission. This led to his next venture, as one of the founders of the Edmonton Symphony, and then to the Drama Council. Doug Homersham became president of the Drama Council after Clarence Richards had left.

The Drama Council was conceived as an umbrella organization for the various

groups connected with theatre in the city. For the first few years, the Council met intermittently at various houses and offices, but in 1955 a plan was announced to move two former airport buildings to a new site to house the Edmonton Drama Council. On January 22, 1955 the *Edmonton Journal* printed a sketch of the Council's new administrative centre, to be located on 109 Street between Princess Elizabeth Avenue and Kingsway. This would place it at about the site where the Kingsway office of the Alberta Motor Association is now located. This central office would provide a single location to sell tickets for the Light Opera of Edmonton, the Junior Hospital League's "Varieties", Studio Theatre, Circle Eight and Orion Musical Theatre. There were other member groups not mentioned in the Journal story. Construction work to connect two existing buildings was to begin in March, and the groups concerned were to raise money for the estimated necessary $3,000.00. The Council had also been registered under the Societies Act:

> "to promote and encourage the activities of all dramatic organizations in Edmonton and in the vicinity of Edmonton; to organize and conduct drama festivals for these organizations; to conduct classes and workshops in the theatre crafts and to provide scholarships and bursaries for students of dramatic art."

Nothing ever came of this plan, and the eventual location of the Drama Council was in an old airforce building at the corner of 118 Avenue and 106 Street. Meetings and rehearsals of the member-groups were held in this building, reportedly "widely used" by the end of 1956 (EJ Dec 29, 1956). This was, in many ways, similar to the function of the Recreation Hall, except that there was no space for actual productions. In 1957 John

Stoddart[138] became the president and member groups were asked to participate in fund-raising for the Drama Council. By November,1959, Stoddart was becoming concerned that the building was not being much used, and by the end of the year, the building was plagued by frozen pipes. Member groups were asked to help with cleaning and re-decorating the building, but by November, 1961 the Drama Council Building was on its last legs (UAA 73-140 CWTG Nov. 20, 1961). The end came with a letter dated June 28,1961 from the city commissioner, J.M. Tweddle, to the Alberta Department of Transport, saying that Building No. 490 at the Municipal Airport, "at present occupied by the Edmonton Drama Council" was to be torn down, as it "is situated on the site on which the new Northern Alberta Institute of Technology is to be built." The Drama Council had been given notice to vacate the building by December 31, 1961 (CEA RG 11 Class B File 49).

The Edmonton Drama Council sponsored two Alberta Regional One-act Drama Festivals in 1953 and 1954. The 1955 Festival was co-sponsored by the Drama Council and the Alberta Drama League. But, as one who sat on the committee, representing the Canadian Women's Theatre Guild, it is the opinion of the present writer that the Council was very much a paper organization. It had laudable intentions, but it simply did not function as a consistent support to city theatre, and the individuals in the member groups were occupied with their own productions.

Before the demise of the Edmonton Drama Council, the Edmonton Allied Arts

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[138]Later married to Bette Anderson.

Council had been created. It arose in the fall of 1956 out of a committee summoned by Walter Kaasa to work on Dedication Week at the new Jubilee Auditorium in 1957. Richard Eaton, Chair of the Music Division at the University was elected Chair of the committee, the Vice-Chairman was Morton Coburn, Director of the Edmonton Public Library and the Secretary-Treasurer was Bette Anderson, Supervisor of the Expressive Arts Section of the Recreation Department of the city. The aim of the committee was to provide a central co-ordinating agency for cultural and recreational groups.

In September 1958 the Allied Arts Council began to publish their monthly newsletter – *Town Talk* – which contained news and reviews of current artistic activities throughout the city. By December that year the organization had set up a central box office in the Heintzman music store, under the directorship of Faith Clifton. This box office was staffed by volunteers, and any revenues were put into the general revenues of the Council, which "now claims group memberships from 27 organizations" and was going to handle tickets for the Dominion Drama Festival and two Christmas productions. "The Council's plans for the future include a regular radio program and a one-day festival in the Jubilee Auditorium in June" (CEA RG 21 19; EJ Dec 13, 1958).

In June, 1959, Edmonton held its first Summer Festival of the Arts in the Jubilee Auditorium, under the auspices of the Edmonton Allied Arts Council. In addition to the Edmonton Symphony Orchestra, the University Singers, and a recital by local pianist Marek Jablonski, the Edmonton Allied Arts Council sponsored a performance of *Before the Flood* by A.A.Milne – a humorous play about Noah's Ark. The Recreation

Commission underwrote the production; it was directed by Frank Glenfield and designed by Detta Lange. Among the cast were Marjorie Knowler, Len Crowther, Mary Glenfield, Lloy Coutts, John Rivet and Larry Trahan. Working behind the scenes were actors Reta Stocks, Derek Barton, Macdonald Knowler, Elsa Houba, Barry Hanslip, Doris Coutts, Roman Charnetski, and Bill Kuziw.

The Festival was a great success and plans were made to repeat it in June 1960, when the City and the Junior League sponsored a performance of *The Stranger* by Brian Way, directed by Bette Anderson, with sets by Harry Hartland, and costumes designed by Marjorie Knowler. In the cast were many Theatre for Children actors, including Judy Unwin, Phil Silver, Albin Shanley, Eric Candy, Renee Laird, and Richard Gishler. The production staff was headed by Pat Lucas. In addition to *The Stranger*, another play, *Harlequinade* by Terence Rattigan, was mounted by the Court Players. This was a remount of a very successful Players production. It had won the Edmonton Regional One-Act Alberta Drama League Festival in March, 1956, and had gone on to further success at the provincial finals in Red Deer. The revival for the summer festival in 1960 had virtually the same cast and production crew. *Harlequinade* was directed by Marjorie Knowler, and the Production Manager was Wally McSween. Among the cast were Don Biamonte, Gilly Brand, Macdonald Knowler, Elsa Houba, Maurice Brand, Dick Savill, Tony Rowlands and Vic Bristow. It is an example of the interwoven nature of the Edmonton groups, that Court Players thanked Studio Theatre, Edmonton Circle Eight Theatre, the Edmonton Drama Council and Theatre for Children. Unfortunately, the 1960

Festival did not go as well as that of the previous year, so it was not continued in 1961. Richard Eaton was quoted as saying "Perhaps we were too optimistic" after the previous year's success, and "maybe we should have kept to one day" (CEA RG 21 19, EJ Jun 6, 1960).

The editor of *Town Talk*, Dick Morton, wrote an interesting editorial in the May, 1961 issue. As he said "important as the edifice may be, more important still are the things that go on inside it." He also wrote: "In my brief time as editor of *Town Talk* one of the most surprising revelations was the large number of cultural groups in this city." And he ended by saying that these groups were faced with an opportunity to combine for a purpose: "That purpose is to make sure that in the Civic Centre there is a place for the arts" (TT May 1961).

As indicated previously (pages 54-55), on September 15, 1962, the Allied Arts Council presented a brief to the City of Edmonton on "Proposed Plan for Co-ordination of Edmonton's Participation in the Centennial Celebration in 1967"(CEA RG 11 Class 11 File 1). The suggestions submitted were to:

> Assist with placing the right people, as individuals or as groups, with the right project for Canada's Centennial.
>
> Assist in the co-ordination of all Centennial activities in order to generate an effective team effort preferably culminating with the proposed four week festival in 1967.
>
> Affect the kind of continuous leadership needed to maintain interest and creativity in Centennial programs.
>
> Assist in assuring a high quality and good taste of Centennial projects.

> We therefore submit that no time should be lost in arranging a completion date for 1967 of at least a portion of the proposed civic centre to contain an intimate theatre and adequate recreational facilities for the city's programs of arts, crafts, hobbies and sports.

As we have seen in the community section of this thesis, the Civic Centre never came to pass; nor did the plans of the Allied Arts Council for centennial projects in 1967. *Town Talk* continued to be published, but the Allied Arts Council never did reach its full potential.

In 1952, Elizabeth Sterling Haynes was very aware of the explosion of theatre interest at the beginning of the 1950s , and she decided that there was a great need to develop a theatrically educated public. Some of this had already happened, because of the variety and standard of the play productions done in the city over the years. But Mrs. Haynes felt that theatre-goers needed to be more challenged and stimulated. By this time, the city had 200,000 residents, large enough, she felt, to sustain an *informed* theatre audience. As always, she had her finger on the pulse of new developments, and was ready to re-invent both herself and her interests.

On September 11, 1952, a group of women met at the Studio Theatre to discuss the formation of a Canadian Women's Theatre Guild. It was the great hope of Mrs. Haynes that an Edmonton guild would be the start of a network of theatre guilds across the country. She believed that the city theatre scene could be the catalyst for interest in other cities, beginning in the west. One of the immediate activities was to be the sponsorship of a short course of lectures on playwriting, to be given by Elsie Park Gowan

and Gwen Pharis Ringwood.

The overall mandate and objectives of the Guild, as set out later by Sue Laycock, in the December 1956 Alberta Drama League Newsletter (UAA 92.22 Box 1 File 7), were:

1) To promote Canadian professional and semi-professional theatre;

2) To support the D.D.F. [Dominion Drama Festival], inasmuch as it is the only National Theatre organization in existence in Canada;

3) To develop a greater audience participation in the living theatre;

4) To promote all forms of theatre training;

5) To further the employment of Canadians who are already trained;

6) To promote the formation of Women's Theatre Guilds all over Canada;

7) To establish scholarships, fellowships etc. for the theatre training of talented young Albertans.

One of the first sponsorships, promoting the second objective, was to support two local productions, Shakespeare's *Othello* and Eugene O'Neill's *Emperor Jones*, on February 16 and 17, 1953 at Victoria School Auditorium. These two plays, the former mounted by the Studio Theatre, the latter by the Civil Service Playhouse, were competing for the opportunity to represent Alberta at the Dominion Drama Festival in Victoria that May. The Guild had already sponsored a performance of Studio Theatre's *She Stoops to Conquer* by Oliver Goldsmith in November 1952, and were to sponsor another Studio play, Luigi Pirandello's *Right You Are if You Think So*, in November 1953. This was in

line with the fourth objective, that of encouraging theatre training. In the same category was the sponsorship of the Pirikapo Players' production of *The Blue Bird* by Maurice Maeterlinck in 1954, and *The Yellow Jacket* by Hazelton and Benrimo in 1955. The Guild also established a teachers' bursary for Children's Theatre. These sponsorships were mainly financial; they depended first of all on donations, and later on profits from the plays. This was especially true of the profits from the touring Canadian Players which was also sponsored by the Canadian Women's Theatre Guild.

In the summer of 1953, an influential professional theatre organization had sprung up from unlikely ground in a railway town in Ontario. This was the Stratford Shakespeare Festival. Just one year later, this venture spawned a touring group called the Canadian Players, which was made up of many of the Festival actors, and which was founded by Tom Patterson and Douglas Campbell, to take theatre to other provinces and to the United States. By the following year, Edmonton was included in their itinerary, and the Canadian Players presented *Saint Joan* by Bernard Shaw and *Macbeth* by William Shakespeare on February 7, 8 and 9, 1955 in the Victoria School auditorium. *Macbeth* had already had a great review in London, Ontario, written by J. Burke Martin: "I have seldom heard an audience so spellbound. Not only was this great theatre, it was Canadian theatre come of age" (UAA 73-140 Box 2 CWTG). The Edmonton review of *Saint Joan*, signed J.J.T. was also ecstatic: "The evening was a triumph for Miss Hyland" (UAA 73-140 Box 2 CWTG).

For many years, the Canadian Women's Theatre Guild not only sponsored the

Canadian Players and entertained the actors for dinners and parties in various private homes, they also arranged the venues for the plays and for the tickets to be sold through the Allied Arts Box Office. This sponsorship was in line with the Guild's first, third and fifth objectives, to both further the employment of Canadians who were already trained, and to give the Edmonton audience the experience of professional theatre. From April 3 - 6, 1957, the plays performed were Shakespeare's *Othello* and Shaw's *Man and Superman.* The Canadian Players brought Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* and Shaw's *Pygmalion* to Edmonton on March 6 and 7, 1959. The review in the *Edmonton Journal*, signed J.W.D.[139] speaks of "Campbell's electrifying presence" and "Miss Casson's insidious and persuasive charm" and also the "brilliant use of the company's uniquely designed stage"(UAA 73-140 Box 2 EJ Apr 4 1957). But in 1960, their productions of Shakespeare's *Comedy of Errors* and Shaw's *The Devil's Disciple* were not well attended. In a talk on CKUA Jack McCreath asserted that a lapse in excellence the previous year undoubtedly accounted for the small houses (UAA 73-140 Box 1 CWTG). It seems that Edmonton audiences were becoming increasingly knowledgeable and discriminating.

However, the Canadian Players continued to come to Edmonton for several more years, sponsored by the Women's Theatre Guild. Brecht's *Caucasian Chalk Circle* and Shakespeare's *The Tempest* were performed in the city in the 1960-1961 season, and Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar* and Shaw's *Saint Joan* came here on March 23 and 24,

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Probably John Dafoe, who is now with the Winnipeg Free Press. His wife is Arlene McMicking, who was in many Edmonton plays.

1962. The former elicited a scathing review from Desmond Bill: "It is almost heresy to admit Shakespeare can be boring, but the Canadian Players proved it Friday night with their production of *Julius Caesar*" (UAA 73-140 Box 2 CWTG). John Keeping's review of *Saint Joan* was much more favourable: "After a disappointing performance of *Julius Caesar* the Canadian Players bounced back with a splendid presentation of *Saint Joan*" (UAA 73-140 Box 2 CWTG).

From November 23 to 25, 1961, an extra production from the Players, a musical comedy entitled *All About Us* by Len Peterson was produced and was directed by John Hirsch, Artistic Director of the Manitoba Theatre Centre.[140] The review by Barry Westgate was not at all favourable: "Canadians need pride. *All About Us* uses too much ridicule to expect success." However, he did praise Eric House, Bruno Gerussi and Hugh Webster (UAA 73-140 Box 2 EJ Nov. 24 1961).

The standard of performance was definitely seen to be going down, and after having sponsored the productions of *Julius Caesar* and *St. Joan* in 1962, the Women's Theatre Guild decided not to bring The Canadian Players to Edmonton the following season. The Players had sent a letter to the Guild, saying that they had reorganized themselves and were keen to bring a series of readings called "Masterpieces of Comedy" to Edmonton. However, the Guild declined to sponsor this production; and this decision marked the end of the Guild's relationship with The Canadian Players. In 1964 the

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[140]Later to become the head of Stratford's Shakespeare Festival.

Players moved their headquarters to Toronto, because of declining support across the country, and in 1966 they stopped touring.

Meanwhile the Guild, with the Alberta Drama League, co-sponsored the One-Act Play Festival on March 9 and 10, 1956, and they also assisted in the backing for the visit of the Royal Winnipeg Ballet on February 11, 12 and 13, 1957. But the Canadian Women's Theatre Guild did not sponsor another Dominion Drama Festival final. In fact, in 1960 the Medicine Hat News wrote that local Festival officials had said that the probable reason for no Edmonton or Calgary play (at the Medicine Hat finals) was that their sets were built for the Jubilee Auditoriums, and hence were too large for most other festival stages.[141] The newspaper believed that ". . . a more accurate reason is that amateur drama groups in Calgary and Edmonton have become financially spoiled . . ." The editorial went on to say that : "Someone should deliver a short, sharp lecture on sportsmanship to the theatre groups in our big sister cities to the north" (Reprinted in the March, 1960 *Town Talk*). The real reason for the lack of participation by the two main Alberta cities was undoubtedly because, by this time, the local theatre groups in Edmonton and Calgary were totally occupied with their own seasons of plays. Whatever the reason for the lack of Calgary/Edmonton entries in the Dominion Drama Festival, this festival was also, like the Canadian Players, reaching the end of its days.[142]

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[141] Plays done by local groups in Edmonton or Calgary were usually not produced first at the Jubilee Auditoriums.

[142] In 1970 it was renamed Theatre Canada – a showcase, rather a competition. The group folded in 1978.

Mrs. Haynes, who in 1955 left Edmonton with her husband, died in Ontario in 1957. At a meeting of the Canadian Women's Theatre Guild on February 15, 1958, the decision was made to establish the Elizabeth Sterling Haynes Memorial Scholarship. This was to be an enlarged version of the two one hundred and fifty dollar scholarships already in place, which had been given from the group's inception to 1958, to Paula Downey, Mrs. Douglas Ray, Arlene McMicking, Alizon Grodeland and Harold Baldridge.[143]

From 1958 to 1963, the winners were Garry Mitchell, Alan Sheppard, Beverly Barnhouse, Richard Wray, Barbara Luttmer, Karen Austin, Lloy Coutts, Kenneth Welsh, Alan Blevis (twice) and Hutchison Shandro (twice). The majority of these recipients were graduates of the University of Alberta Department of Drama and many of them, particularly Ken Welsh, went on to become major figures in Canadian theatre, as well as film and television. They were to pass on their skills to later generations of theatre artists throughout Canada, the United States, and overseas.

The sixties were a time of gradual decline for the Canadian Women's Theatre Guild. More and more theatre groups and activities were happening in Edmonton, and the professional theatre was about to begin. In September 1967, the books of the Canadian Women's Theatre Guild (Edmonton Branch) were closed, the remaining funds were given to the University of Alberta Department of Drama, and the Guild was dissolved

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He became Artistic Director of Theatre Calgary from 1972-78 and was later the Artistic Director of the Neighborhood Playhouse in New York.

in accordance with the provisions of the Societies Act. The records were donated to the University of Alberta Archives by Mrs. P. Gishler (the Guild's last President), and Mrs. L.M. Marshall (its last Treasurer).

So, did the Women's Theatre Guild succeed in its various aims? On the whole it did; but its achievements were mainly limited to Edmonton, and were only then extended to the wider scene, such as the sponsorship of the Canadian Players. Mrs. Haynes had hoped that the Guild and its aims would reach across the country, with a network of related organizations. But except for a short-lived Women's Theatre Guild in Regina, the Edmonton Branch remained alone and solitary. Robert Browning wrote: "A man's reach should exceed his grasp, Or what's a Heaven for?" But the grasp of the Women's Theatre Guild was limited and it lost its greatest visionary with the illness and subsequent death of Mrs. Haynes .

Chapter Six. Subsidized Theatre

This section deals with drama projects funded with public money. For many years, from the end of the 1940s through the 1970s, the Alberta Government was a constant supporter of the arts in the province. In March 1946, the Province of Alberta passed the Cultural Development Act (APA 72 177 Box 25), which was to consolidate all provincial cultural activities under the Department of Economic Affairs. Alberta was the first Canadian province to pass such an Act, and indeed, the Act was unique in North America. Richard MacDonald was appointed by the Alberta government to be the first Co-Ordinator of Cultural Activities in the Department of Economic Affairs.

The Act provided for Boards to be formed, "whose functions shall be the encouragement, expansion, co-ordination and development of different aspects of the cultural life of the Province," (#3) and each Board "may carry out surveys, encourage community activities, call public meetings, promote publicity campaigns . . . and . . . do any act or thing having for its purpose the promotion of the field or fields of cultural activity with which it is concerned." (#6a, The Cultural Development Act - office consolidation - Being chapter 9 of the Statutes of Alberta, 1946, and amendments up to and including 1949).

The Boards, which were set up by " The Lieutenant Governor in Council, on the recommendation of the Minister,"[144] were Music, the Visual Arts, Drama, and Libraries. In this thesis, of course, I shall concentrate on the Drama Board. The members of the

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[144]Ambrose Holowach, but not specific to him.

first Alberta Drama Board were Alan Macdonald (Edmonton) who was Chairman, Betty Mitchell (Calgary), Mrs. D. Hays (Medicine Hat), Professor Robert Orchard (Edmonton), Gwillym Edwards (Calgary), and Richard MacDonald (Edmonton) who served as Secretary.

The Drama Board decided that its best course of action would be to assist the Alberta Drama League with its work on the Festivals. Provincial government assistance was given to enable the winning play in the Regionals to go to the Finals. In addition, the Board helped to organize the 1947 spring tour of the University Provincial Players, and it was hoped that this would raise sufficient funds to put the Players on a sound financial footing.

Perhaps the best overall assessment and explanation of the Drama Board is expressed in an essay describing "Alberta's Cultural Boards", written by Blake MacKenzie (APA 72.177 Cards 1 and 2). This is undated, but it was probably written soon after the passing of the Cultural Development Act. He explains that there were actually two pieces of legislation passed at the same time: "These two pieces of legislation are known as the Cultural Development Act, and an act providing for the establishment of public libraries", called, very suitably, the Libraries Act. The four Cultural Boards spanned both of these Acts, covering Music, Drama, Visual Arts, and Libraries. MacKenzie writes that the funds to local ventures, which were made available through the Cultural Boards, were "encouraged consistently by additional funds, and by an extremely far-sighted and liberal policy on the part of the Government."

In June 1948, the Cultural Activities Branch, Department of Economic Affairs, began to publish a little periodical called "Cultural Activity News." In June 1951, this became *Leisure*, a small booklet with a picture on the front cover as usual, but with more pictures scattered throughout its pages.

Dick MacDonald left the province in August 1950, to become the Secretary-Treasurer of the Dominion Drama Festival,[145] and Blake MacKenzie took his place as co-ordinator of Cultural Activities, and also as secretary of the Drama Board. Robert Orchard succeeded Alan Macdonald as Chairman, and Esther Nelson, from the University of Alberta Department of Extension, joined the Board.

One of the most frustrating things about archival information is the fact that dated documents are few and far between. In a later Report of the Drama Board, undated, signed by Gwillym Edwards, the preliminary paragraph gives the opinion that "Canada has now reached the status of Nationhood in the realm of Trade and Commerce", and it speaks of "Alberta being particularly rich in natural resources." This Report lists five provincial accomplishments:

1) drama in the High Schools;

2) a Fine Arts Department at the University of Alberta;

3) the Cultural Activities Act and its four resultant Boards;

4) the Banff School of Fine Arts, which was under the jurisdiction of the University of Alberta in Edmonton;

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[145]And later, Director.

5) the appointment of a full-time Supervisor of Drama in the University's Department of Extension.

The Report gives a tip of the hat to "the people who have come here from many lands," and goes on to say: "We know of no influence more potent to race assimilation, than the influence of drama" though the word "assimilation" sounds more like the American melting-pot model than the Canadian mosaic.

The achievements of the Drama Board are listed as:

1. Loans to community centres for stages and lighting;
2. Loans to travelling groups, amateur or professional;
3. Collaboration between the four Boards for an Arts Magazine and for travelling exhibitions;
4. Community theatre workshops;
5. Scholarships;
6. Co-operation between the Drama Board and the Alberta Drama League.

The Drama Board gives credit to Dick MacDonald for the 1950 Dominion Drama Festival being held in Alberta, the first time in the West[146]. This was "held at Calgary last May", which dates the Report in late 1950 or early1951.

In 1950, although the University of Alberta Provincial Players were granted financial assistance to tour Alberta, there was no tour in 1951. It was stressed, however,

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[146]On the second page, we get the probable year of this Report, though not the actual date.

that funds were needed to make sure the plays were of high quality.[147]

Meanwhile, it would seem that oil development in the province spurred the passing of yet another provincial Act. On August 20, 1951, this was explained in a notice from Blake MacKenzie, which was sent to all members of the four Boards. The notice said that: "Some consideration has been given to the possibility of establishing an honour . . . to persons who have devoted the greater part of their lives to the arts, letters, and humanities." This honour should also be granted to "younger persons who are now making appreciable contributions." The point is made that: "A great many of our talented young people leave the province . . ." and notes that "many individuals in smaller communities never have any honour or recognition." MacKenzie suggested that an "Alberta Academy" be established by Act of the Legislature. Members of the Academy would be those who had been recommended by the Boards for this honour. There would also be Electors of the Academy who would have the responsibility to vote Members into office. The Electors themselves "will be nominated by the Board concerned and established as an Elector by Order in Council." MacKenzie asked the Alberta Drama Board members to let him have their reaction in time to prepare a Bill for the Spring Legislative Assembly. He also suggested that a lapel emblem, "an Alberta rose . . . designed by our Alberta artists" would indicate the wearer's status as a Member or an Elector of the Academy.

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There is no clue as to the quality in 1950, but we are left to infer cause and effect. We may wonder, however, if there were other forces at work, particularly in opposition to Robert Orchard.

This idea took shape in Bill No. 73 of 1952: An Act to Create the Alberta Academy to be known as *The Alberta Academy Act* (APA 72.177 Box 25). The Bill set out the Constitution, the procedures for appointing the Electors of the Academy and for choosing the Members. The Bill also made provision for any money and property which the Academy might possess, and for the disbursement of bursaries, scholarships, and fellowships to individuals, as well as grants to cultural programs. Finally, the Bill stated that: "This Act shall come into force on the first day of July, 1952."

So *The Alberta Academy Act* was launched with the backing of the Alberta Government, and was signed by The Honourable A. Hooke, Minister of Economic Affairs. In a letter dated November 4, 1952 to R.R. Moore, Deputy Minister, Blake MacKenzie writes of "the Alberta Academy Act which was passed last session, but which has not thus far been implemented" (A.P.A. 72.177 Box 25, Culture, Youth & Recreation). In fact, the Act apparently sank like a stone, leaving not a ripple.

1952 also saw the inauguration of "Maytime in Alberta" (experimentally) in the Peace River Country (APA 72.172. Cultural Activities). This consisted of a display of crafts, as well as a chorus, a string quartet, a dance group and three one-act plays. "It was a four-day touring festival, which visited eight of the communities in the Peace River area in Northern Alberta."[148] It is remarkable that this initial package could be presented in four days. The present writer remembers being in a play in the 1958 Maytime, performed in eight localities in eight days, which was a very hectic experience.

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A letter from Blake MacKenzie, Co-ordinator of Cultural Activities, to Mrs. A.G. Higham in Saskatoon, Dec. 3, 1952(APA 72.177 Box 25 Culture, Youth & Recreation).

MacKenzie called "Maytime in Alberta" ". . . a circus promotion in the interest of the fine arts," which was probably a good way of describing it! And he wrote that : "These towns, isolated from the rest of the Province by a couple of hundred miles of waste land, often feel that they are being ignored by the rest of the people of the Province." He also said that the tour led to various groups of people in the different communities setting up craft centres, drama groups and sponsoring lecture tours. All of which, he wrote, was made possible by the Cultural Development Act of 1946.

Blake MacKenzie left the Department in 1955, and for a year the position was left vacant, with Evan Plewes serving as Acting Co-ordinator. In 1955, Jack McCreath took on the new position of Drama Supervisor for the province, and in 1956, Walter Kaasa became Co-ordinator of Cultural Activities. Kaasa, of course, had had a long and valuable connection with drama in the city, both as an actor and teacher. He continued his acting career, as much as possible, after his career began in Cultural Activities.

In 1956, a fruitful partnership was formed between Jack McCreath and Elsie Park Gowan. She wrote the script and he the music for *The Jasper Story.* This was funded by Alberta Cultural Activities and the town of Jasper, and was produced and directed by McCreath in a natural outdoor amphitheatre at the Palisades, six miles east of Jasper townsite. The project was also a collaboration between Edmonton actors and Jasper townspeople; the voices of the former were taped in the city at C.F.R.N., then amplified for the production, while the latter acted the scenes on the wider landscape for the actual performances. The lead voice was that of Walter Kaasa, and there was every intention to make the pageant showing the history of Jasper Valley, from the time of the early

voyageurs to the present day, into an annual production.

Jack McCreath continued as the main producer of *The Jasper Story* until 1960, its fifth year. The pageant carried on for the next few years, and then ended. An article in the *Edmonton Journal* of June 27, 1959, said that the pageant was billed as "The West's greatest musical historama." Whether this was truth or advertising is a moot point. It played each July for ten nights, featuring a company of 60 actors, 12 dancers, 40 singers, a 20-piece orchestra and 20 horses.

Meanwhile, the Department was still publishing *Leisure*(APA 72.21 Cards 1 and 2),[149] and the drama content was mainly social information about local people and productions in Alberta. But almost as soon as Jack McCreath arrived, he began to write and solicit articles of more depth. He was also able to use *Leisure* to bring certain problems and concerns to the attention of the authorities. For instance, in the Spring 1966 issue, he decried the lack of a real theatre for the Medicine Hat Regional Drama Festival, and spoke of the need for a real home for any drama group. By April, 1956, McCreath was going regularly to the Bowden Institution for Delinquents, to start up a drama group. He decided to produce *Toad of Toad Hall*, based on a segment of Kenneth Grahame's *Wind in the Willows*, for the fifteen- and sixteen-year-old delinquent youths; he went out there once a week, or more often, to rehearse with them. He wrote of the growing interest of the boys, of progress and then regress, but slowly more progress than regress, and, at last, a great opening night. The boys so enjoyed the experience of having

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[149]Copies of *Leisure* 1948-1967.

an audience that they wanted a rehearsal again the next day before the second performance.

In March, 1957, *Leisure* appeared as a printed magazine, with an article by Walter Kaasa about the soon-to-be-opened Jubilee Auditoriums, the Northern in Edmonton, the Southern in Calgary. Two years before this, in 1955, both Alberta and Saskatchewan had celebrated their fiftieth Anniversaries as provinces. It was common knowledge among the general public that the Saskatchewan government was far ahead of the government of Alberta in planning the celebrations for their 50th Anniversary; the Saskatchewan special events programs were well under way compared to those in Alberta, and the plans for their auditoriums were also more advanced. But the Alberta government was galvanized into action, government architects were set to work, and on Sunday April 28, 1957, the same day that the Northern Alberta Jubilee Auditorium was opened to the public in Edmonton, the Southern Alberta Jubilee Auditorium was also opened in Calgary. The various dignitaries were flown between the two cities. This was two years after the actual anniversary.

Several files in the Provincial Archives are full of letters from people all across the province, asking for seats for the opening day. The Edmonton groups who were represented in the planning for the opening week were: Circle Eight; Court Players; Alberta Drama League (Edmonton zone); Drama Council of Edmonton; Canadian Women's Theatre Guild; Junior Hospital League/Children's Theatre; Alumni Players - Studio A; Studio Theatre; Mrs. J.B. Carmichael, representing Edmonton Civic Opera; Edmonton Light Opera; Capital Choral Society; and Varieties. The participation of so

many arts groups was not, I believe, from a need to support the arts on the part of the provincial government, but from a fear that Saskatchewan was getting ahead of Alberta.

Representatives from all these organizations had met constantly, under the chairmanship of Bette Anderson, from Edmonton Parks and Recreation, to discuss the format of the opening week. An example of the problems which had to be faced by the committee, was that the original number of participants on Ethnic Night was scheduled to be 941. The program was more than four hours in length, and would have to be reduced. The schedule for the lineup for Ethnic Night, as quoted in the printed documents, included: Scandinavian; Welsh; British;[150] Scottish; German; Polish; Ukrainian; Italian; Native Indian; Latvian; French; Chinese; Hungarian.

Ron Wigmore[151] was an Englishman who had stage-managed shows in London, England and had also worked in Australia. He was *en route* by train to Vancouver, with the intention of leaving again for Australia, when he was told by another passenger about the new auditorium soon to be opened in Edmonton. So he got off the train, applied at the Legislature, and, by the afternoon had been appointed official stage manager for the opening week. This was a job which the Alberta government had not considered in their planning, so his application was fortuitous. Wigmore had no intention, at that time, of staying in Edmonton beyond the end of the auditorium opening events. However, he was asked by the government to remain as resident stage manager, so that they could continue

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[150]Presumably this means English.

[151]Later the General Manager of the Jubilee Auditorium.

to operate the auditorium.

Finally, everything was ready, and the Northern and Southern Jubilee Auditoriums were opened on Sunday, April 28, 1957.[152] They were later used regularly by the Edmonton Symphony and the Calgary Philharmonic orchestras, by the opera companies and also by the Alberta Ballet.. But, even though they were also used for a time by various theatre groups, they were not ideal for plays. In fact Phillip Silver, while still a very young man of twenty-one, told Adriana Albi of the *Edmonton Journal* his objections to the main Auditorium stage. He spoke very strongly of the inadequacies of the space: "The Jubilee Auditorium, beautiful as it is, has also done a great deal of harm to local theatre." He believed that Edmonton needed a moderately sized theatre in the city centre, and gave his opinion that "local audiences have developed an auditorium complex . . . because of its snob appeal, in spite of the fact that local groups cannot perform well in the huge building" (EJ Aug 28, 1964).

The Department of Cultural Activities continued to support groups and individuals across the province. The Drama Supervisor reported the growth of new drama groups throughout Alberta – in Jasper, High Prairie, Penhold, Valleyview, Tofield, Stettler, Red Deer, Drumheller, Cold Lake, Medicine Hat, Peace River and Lethbridge. There had also been workshops held at Grande Prairie, Red Deer, Lethbridge, St. Paul, Medicine Hat and Morinville. In all of this, of course, the Drama Supervisor was able to build on the work done beforehand in outlying areas of the province, by Elizabeth Sterling Haynes, by Sidney

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The opening week program for the Northern Alberta Jubilee Auditorium is given in the Appendix.

Risk and by Esther Nelson. This, in fact, took over the outreach to smaller communities originally performed by the University of Alberta Extension Department.

At the same time, Jack McCreath deplored the fact that, even after the opening of the auditoriums in Edmonton and Calgary, many groups in both cities were still homeless. But "nowhere in Canada today are young Canadians getting so much assistance and encouragement for local and provincial bodies as in Alberta"(A.P.A. 72.177 cards 1&2, Culture, Youth & Recreation). A letter dated May 7, 1962, from Walter Kaasa to the Honourable A.R. Patrick, the Provincial Secretary, says that "Mr. McCreath is now developing his five-year program for drama in this province"(A.P.A.72.177 cards 1 & 2, Culture, Youth & Recreation).

In 1959, the Cultural Activities Branch had been transferred from the Department of Economic Affairs to the Department of the Provincial Secretary and was renamed Culture, Youth and Recreation. One of the successful ventures was the establishment of the Summer Drama Seminars in Olds in 1960. This was Jack McCreath's own vision for a theatre school for young Albertans. Eventually the Seminars moved to Drumheller, and became The Drumheller Summer Drama School. Through McCreath's contacts in Britain he decided to aim high for instructors, and wrote to Tyrone Guthrie and Tania Moiseivitsch to ask if they were available. Both of them had worked at the Stratford Shakespeare Festival as director and designer, and by a lucky fluke both of them were available to teach at Drumheller. In fact, McCreath was kept busy all over the province, as well as attending conferences in Canada and the United States. At the same time, he was founding Edmonton/Walterdale Theatre Associates in his home base of Edmonton.

Cultural Activities had always supported the Alberta Drama League with a grant for each festival. But these festivals were gradually becoming less viable. In fact, on March 3, 1960, at a meeting of the A.D.L., Gordon Peacock made the interesting comment that "a number of drama groups in the province would be in a better position today if they had not entered a festival." This is something about which Frank Glenfield felt very strongly when he was the President of Workshop 14 in Calgary. Many times he had the support of the group *not* to go to the Finals of the D.D.F. in Toronto, Ottawa etc., in order to save the money for a permanent home for the group, only to be outmanœuvred by Betty Mitchell, who had already accepted the D.D.F. invitation for the Finals.

On December 31, 1964, Walter Kaasa wrote a report to the Provincial Secretary, Ambrose Holowach, explaining the background to the Regional Drama Festival. He explained that the Festival sponsor, the Alberta Drama League, was the Alberta Branch of the Dominion Drama Festival. For ten years, one thousand dollars per year had been granted to the A.D.L. to assist them in sponsoring the Three-Act and final One-Act regional festivals. The A.D.L. got its $1000.00 grant for the 1964-1965 season. But the festivals, certainly the three-acts, were on their last legs. This was foreshadowed in the article already quoted, from the Medicine Hat news, which virtually stated that Edmonton and Calgary were getting too big for their breeches!

The other source of funded theatre in Edmonton was the City of Edmonton Council and Administration. Theatre for Children, of course, was jointly funded by the City of Edmonton Parks and Recreation Department, and the Junior Hospital League. Although it was not quite as quick off the mark as the Alberta Government in its support

of the arts, the city soon realised that it was necessary to have a full-time Drama Supervisor in the Parks and Recreation Department. It has already been pointed out that the 1950s saw a surge of population in Edmonton, and all across Canada, but particularly in Alberta. With more money pouring into the treasury, it was not considered strange that both the Alberta provincial government and the City of Edmonton should have their own heads of cultural departments.

After Bette Anderson was appointed Drama Supervisor for the City of Edmonton, one of her first decisions was to produce mental health plays, to be offered to city clubs, societies and schools, under the joint sponsorship of the City and the Edmonton Branch of the Canadian Mental Health Association. These had been part of the program of the Seattle Repertory Company. Both inexperienced and established actors were used in these plays. At each production, the audience, after watching the play, was divided into groups, with a leader who articulated the questions, remarks and problems which had come up in the group discussion. These questions were discussed and were then answered by a psychologist at the performance. The scripts for these plays came, in the main, from the American Mental Health Association in New York. They dealt with child and adult behaviour in the schools and at home. It was much easier for parents in the audience to ask questions and give opinions in such a setting than it would have been if they had been in a discussion group at a regular parent/teacher meeting. Parents found it easier to say, "If I'd been that child's mother or father. . . ." than to say, for instance, "My child steals."

Bette Anderson did not always direct these plays. Both experienced and

developing directors were pressed into service, and encouraged to try their hands. Three of the most popular mental health plays were described in the *Edmonton Journal*: "*Return to Thine Own House* ... brings out the common problem of the returning mental patient in learning to adjust to an ... unsympathetic ... home, former employer, and community ... *And You Never Know* points up the ... tension of sibling jealousy ... *The Case of the Missing Handshake* ... delves into the trouble parents have in bringing their children through the pre-teenage years ..." (EJ Jan 18, 1958). The newspaper reported that: "During the 1957 season the play service of C.M.H.A. helped city organizations with fifty-two performance-programs of the plays." These were given to home and school associations, church groups, and playschool organizations. The mental health plays were acted with no sets, and with only minimal props. "It is believed that the audience is more likely to be stirred by the dramatic presentation than by simply a speaker."

In 1955, Edmonton had commemorated the fiftieth anniversary since the city received its charter. In Spring 1954, Mayor William Hawrelak asked Elsie Park Gowan to write the script for a pageant. Later she said that: "I think the historical musical drama was my greatest contribution to Alberta" (EJ Mar 18, 1978). The pageant written by Gowan for the 1955 celebrations was called *Who Builds a City*. It traced the historical growth of Edmonton, and its development as a community, through the lives of an ordinary family. The family is supposed to have arrived in Edmonton on Inauguration Day, October 4, 1904. The play/pageant/musical encompassed boom, The Great Depression and two world wars, in addition to the founding of the University of Alberta, the amalgamation of the cities of Edmonton and Strathcona, the bush pilots and the

beginning of the airport, the building of the Alaska Highway during the Second World War, and the oil boom after the War, prompted by Leduc #2.

The songs in *Who Builds a City* were well-known tunes to which Elsie Park Gowan had written new lyrics. She said: "I drove my family crazy playing and playing them until I could fit in new words."(EJ, Aug.27, 1954). The overall producer of the event was Doug Homersham, assisted by Kitty Moar; the overall director of the dramatic scenes was Frank Glenfield, and ten assistant directors were in charge of the individual scenes.[153] Many familiar names from the Edmonton theatre were involved with the production. Dr. Balmer Watt, editor emeritus of the *Edmonton Journal*, made his files available for her research Among the actors were Peter Desmond, Sue Laycock, Mickey Macdonald, John Rivet and Margaret Zeidler. The stage and set design was by Don Pimm. Phil Baker and Norman "Muggsy" Forbes[154] were the comedy team following after the horses in various scenes, cleaning up after their mistakes!

On October 8, 1954, about 6,000 people saw *Who Builds a City* at the Edmonton Gardens. It was presented again on the evening of Saturday, October 9, and on the afternoon and evening of Sunday, October 10. The *Edmonton Journal* notes that one of the highlights was "a song and dance routine by Bernie Boyd, who plays an oil worker"(EJ, Oct.9, 1954). Bernie came from Amber Valley, the black community near

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153 These directors were Carl Hare, Laurier Picard, Douglas Campbell, Betty Palate, Georgina Tingey, David Lyons, Michael Goldberg, Mary Forge, Mary Stratton and Faith Clifton.

154 Later the President of Edmonton's Klondike Days.

Lac la Biche, whose settlers had come up from Oklahoma at the end of the nineteenth Century. He had won a jitterbug award in the city the previous year.

In addition to her work on Theatre for Children, mental health plays, and classes for Parks and Recreation, Bette Anderson was also asked to help with other ventures in the city. Beverley Gartnell, Hugh Hicklin, and Anne Howe, employees at the Canadian Chemical and Cellulose Company Ltd, had formed a fledgling drama group. They appealed to Anderson for help; she was too busy, so she turned it over to Frank Glenfield. He chose three one-act plays for them, and they called themselves the Chemcell Players. In their program they wrote, "we have the unique distinction of being the only industrial drama group in Western Canada." On April 25 and 26, 1957, the three plays were presented at the Canadian Chemical Plant. They were *The Dear Departed, The Fifteenth Candle,* and *Johnny Dunn*; all were directed by Frank Glenfield, with set and costume designs by Barbara Hicklin, an artist who went on to design sets for Walterdale Playhouse. Gerry Baril was in charge of make-up, and Len Crowther played the lead character in *Johnny Dunn.* Crowther later played in groups across town, then turned professional. The Chemcell Players continued producing plays for several years.

In October, 1957, it was announced that an Expressive Arts Section had been established under the city Recreation Department, and that four directors had been named to the division: Bette Anderson, the Supervisor of the Expressive Arts Section; Detta Lange, Art Director; Virginia Mighall (later Vogel) Dance Director; and Ann Van Veldhuizen.(EJ, Oct. 12, 1957). Pat Lucas took over Anderson's drama duties. In many ways, as has already been stated, this Expressive Arts Section parallelled the provincial

government's Cultural Activities Department, and there was, in fact, constant and regular communication between the two levels of government. In November, 1957, Bette Anderson was given the Canadian Drama Award for her work in theatre. (EJ, Nov. 19, 1957).

In early 1960, an interesting three-page brochure was put out by Edmonton Parks and Recreation. This was an announcement of a Drama Centre, to be located on the third floor of the Qu'Appelle Building, 10215 - 100 Street. The opening was to be on Monday, January 11, 1960 at 8.00 p.m. The project was sponsored by the University of Alberta Department of Extension, in co-operation with the City of Edmonton Recreation Department. Esther Nelson would be the instructor, and the activities would be on an informal basis, the first hour devoted to exercises in group improvisation, and the second hour to experimental work on plays. These plays would not necessarily be intended for public presentation. There is no mention of the frequency of these classes, but the brochure says that one evening each month would be devoted to a play-reading or a special lecture on a particular playwright. The purpose of the Drama Centre would be:

1) to provide a place where those interested in drama would be able to go regularly to continue training;

2) where teachers could meet regularly;

3) where adults in the community who were not in a position to join a theatre group, but who would like to participate in creative drama, might develop self-confidence and a greater knowledge of drama.

There is no more news of the Centre after this, and certainly the present writer can

remember nothing about it.

In August, 1965, the *Edmonton Journal* announced that the Central Recreation Building, at 10280 - 100 Street, would be demolished by October 15, to make way for the Centennial Building. In many ways, this was the end of an era. The old "Rec" building had been erected in 1944 by United States Army Engineers. It was called the USO Building, was operated by the American Red Cross, and was used as a recreation centre for American troops stationed in Edmonton during the Second World War. In 1947, the federal government had turned the building over to the City of Edmonton, and it was used by the Parks and Recreation Department, with dances every Saturday night, and also a roller skating rink. The *Journal* reported that the "Rec" had "accommodated up to five thousand people a month, associated with nearly fifty organisations." Certainly, many plays were both rehearsed and produced in the building,[155]and, for many years after the opening of the Jubilee Auditorium, plays continued to be rehearsed there. Although the *Journal* write-up announced that "a new recreation building is tentatively expected to be built, as part of the civic centre, just west of the present site on 103rd Avenue," this never came to pass.

A few months before the opening of the Citadel Theatre, in September 1965, it was announced that Bette Anderson, who had already been elected as President of the Canadian Child Drama Association, had been appointed consultant to the Creative Child Drama Centre at Expo'67 in Montreal. (EJ. Jun 11, 1965) This Centre would include

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It was the first building in which the present writer appeared in a play in November,1951.

children's drawings, paintings, music and drama, but observers would only be able to watch children actively participating in music and drama through one-way mirrors. So, in 1966, Bette Anderson said farewell to the city. She was leaving to live in Vancouver, and to marry John Stoddart, whom she had known for many years in Edmonton. By this time, she was President of the Canadian Child and Youth Drama Association, and intended to visit each of its eight regions, from St. John's, Newfoundland to Vancouver, B.C. In 1967, she did come back to Edmonton to direct a variety show, called *Four to Show*, which played on October 16, with Judy Unwin, Shirley Scott, Richard Gishler and Danny Jellis. Barry Westgate had written: "I have a feeling we'll continue to see plenty of her in the time ahead."(EJ. Oct.10 1966). But, sadly, Bette Anderson died unexpectedly, on November 14, 1975.

Chapter Seven. Conclusion

Seen from the vantage point of today, the growth of Edmonton theatre seems to have been steady and inexorable. The theatrical environment in the city today may be cause for pleased self-congratulation, but not for wonder.

But if we look back, the whole development seems much more fragmented and chancy. *Of course*, things did not go altogether smoothly, and *of course*, there were rivalries, jealousies and bickering in and among the various groups. Some theatre companies fell by the wayside, others struggled, and a few of them grew and prospered. So, what made the difference, and tipped the balance towards the theatrical and artistic environment we know today?

At the time, from the 1920s to 1965, each facet or stream of theatre was intent on its own survival. But in each stream, there were people of vision and determination who urged the others to accomplish more than they thought possible. Perhaps as importantly, these leaders were involved in more than one stream. If we look at each of these people in turn, we can see how each of them influenced the groups with which they worked, and perhaps, just as importantly, how each was involved with more than one activity, or stream, of theatre.

Eva Howard had an enormous influence on the students whom she directed in plays at Victoria High School. But her interest in theatre did not stop when she closed the school door behind her. She directed plays for the University Dramatic Society, and for the Edmonton Little Theatre. Some, but by no means all, of the Little Theatre actors had also been in her plays at the school. Many of her former students, such as Bob Folinsbee,

credit her with their lifelong interest in theatre, both as participants and as audience.

Elizabeth Sterling Haynes involved herself with an incredible number of theatre projects. She both directed and acted for the Little and Community Theatres. She encouraged playwrights and actors at Talmud Torah. Her journeys criss-crossing the province for the University of Alberta's Department of Extension brought inspiration and support to the smaller communities, while also showing them that the central support was available to them in Edmonton. By the time she was teaching and directing for the University of Alberta's Drama Division, she was not a well woman, and was even less well when she founded the Canadian Women's Theatre Guild. Even then, she looked to the future, and drove both herself and her projects, until ill health forced her to give them up.

The visions of Robert Orchard and Gordon Peacock were so different, that it may seem almost perverse to list them together. But the fact remains that Peacock did build on Orchard's foundations; the differences were less in the dreaming than in the accomplishing. Robert Orchard believed in giving the students a thorough grounding in ancient, classical, and modern theatre. He was also a passionate advocate of theatre written, acted, and seen by Canadians. The fact that he did not necessarily see his Education students as complete actors is neither here nor there. He provided the foundation on which Gordon Peacock built his own vision of a top school of theatre, a school which has become one of the two in the country[156] which trains students to go straight from school into professional theatre. In the final analysis, the influence of

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[156] The other being the National Theatre School in Montreal.

Orchard and Peacock was not spread by their own involvement in community or professional theatre, but by the involvement of their students.

After Bette Anderson came to Edmonton from the United States, her influence began to spread across Canada through the adults, young people and children who had acted in Theatre for Children plays and Playground Players, and more subtly, through the children and their parents who had watched these plays. She became involved with adult community activities through the plays produced by Edmonton Parks and Recreation for the Canadian Mental Health Association; and although she was always excessively busy, she found time to direct for Studio Theatre and to keep in touch with the Cultural Activities Branch of the Alberta government.

Jack McCreath was involved with the province as a whole, travelling much as had the people from the University of Alberta's Department of Extension. He also founded accessible schools in Olds and Drumheller, where young people could learn the crafts of acting and designing. Why is the word "accessible" important here? Because students who could not afford to pay large tuition fees, or who did not have the qualifications to go to university, were able to go to these summer schools and learn their craft from dedicated and experienced teachers.[157] But McCreath did not just do his job and then relax; he acted and directed for Circle Eight, and then founded Theatre Associates, for which he again both acted and directed. When the latter group was functioning well, and being the restless soul he was, he began Prestige Productions. He had of course also been directed

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One of the Drumheller students is Jackson Davies, the Lennox Furnace man. He has also acted successfully, both on stage and film.

at school by Eva Howard.

So, finally, we arrive at the professional theatre, the Citadel. Its founder, Joe Shoctor, was no carpet-bagger, brought in to make a new theatre work. He was a local boy, born and brought up in Edmonton, directed in plays by both Eva Howard and Elizabeth Sterling Haynes. In 1974, he recalled being directed by Elizabeth thirty years before; he said that "Theatre became as important to me as breathing. . . Elizabeth made me want to be in theatre."[158] He was actor and director in the city for plays at Talmud Torah, for the Community Theatre, for Circle Eight and for Edmonton Light Opera. So it was no great surprise when it was his theatre, the Citadel, that became the first professional theatre in Edmonton. He was able to draw on a broad spectrum of the community, he knew many people who would support the venture, and, perhaps as importantly, he knew what would work in his own city.

So perhaps it is no surprise that Edmonton, the largest northerly city in the western world, needing indoor entertainment because of the long, cold winters, should support a professional theatre. It is more amazing that this need should have led to a proliferation of smaller professional theatres, and more amazing still, that the impetus for such ventures came from these people, these driving forces who lived within one generation of each other. Were they aware of what they were doing? I think that they were – they knew, at least, that they were laying down foundations, and they trusted the people who came later to build on them.

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[158]Gowan, ed. Remembering Elizabeth, p.8.

Appendix: The program of the opening week of the Northern Alberta Jubilee Auditorium

Sunday, April 28, 1957: Northern Alberta Jubilee Auditorium opening. Opened by Premier Ernest Manning. Entertainment by the Edmonton Symphony, the University Chorus and the Air Force Band.

Monday, April 29, 1957: Concert Night; Edmonton Symphony with guest violinist, Betty Jean Hagen.[159]

Tuesday, April 30, 1957: Drama Night; *A Midsummer Night's Dream* by William Shakespeare. Directed by Don Pimm.[160]

Wednesday, May 1, 1957: Ethnic Night - Alberta United Cavalcade: Among the performers were the Spanish dancers, Goya and Mateo. The evening lasted until the early hours of the morning.[161]

Thursday, May 2, 1957: Varieties Night: This was a combination of Jack Unwin's *Varieties* and Dasha Goody's *Orion Theatre*, and was co-directed by the two of them. Connie Towers and Jack Carson were brought in from Hollywood as part of the entertainment.

Friday, May 3, 1957: Opera Night; *Carmen* by Bizet. Directed by Mrs. J.B. Carmichael, of the Edmonton Civic Opera: drama direction by Ray Phipps,

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[159]Originally from Edmonton.

[160]The puff of smoke preceding Puck from below the stage misfired, and the actor rose in black-face.

[161]Ron Wigmore had a very difficult time getting rid of the Chinese contingent, who were on last. As soon as he shepherded one group offstage, another group came on from the other side; and they continued on in this fashion.

representing Eileen Turner of the Edmonton Light Opera. The part of Carmen was sung by Dorothy Harpell, the part of Don José by Carl Norman.

Saturday, May 4, 1957: Afternoon: The Junior Symphony Orchestra and the Theatre for Children production of *Once Upon a Clothesline* by Charlotte Chorpenning, directed by Bette Anderson.

Evening: Pioneer Night [The Past and the Present], called generally The Saturday Night Show, directed by Jack McCreath. This was a mélange of songs, revue sketches, and dances. All the music was written by Jack McCreath, and most of the lyrics were by Peggy Miller.[162]

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The present writer, who was in about six of the sketches, and who wrote the lyrics for one of the songs, remembers the total exhaustion of that week. The dress rehearsal was held at the only time the Auditorium was available, after Varieties Night, from midnight to 8:00 a.m.

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Folinsbee, Robert	September 16, 1998
Glenfield, Frank	Various 1998 - 2001
Hare, Carl	January 10, 1999
Kaasa, Walter	September 25, 2000
Knowler, Marjorie	September 8, 1998
Lakin, Cathy	November 17, 1998
Madill, John	October 21, 1998
Peacocke, Tom	November 3, 2000
Pimm, Don	September 19, 2000

Rivet, John September 22, 1998

Rourke, Vera February 11, 1998

Silver, Phillip January 22, 2001

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